Percy
Gill
GURU-eFX

Vol. 5

X-FORCE

MARVEL

[kra_]
[koa_]

[reign_of_x]

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Vol. 5

X-FORCE

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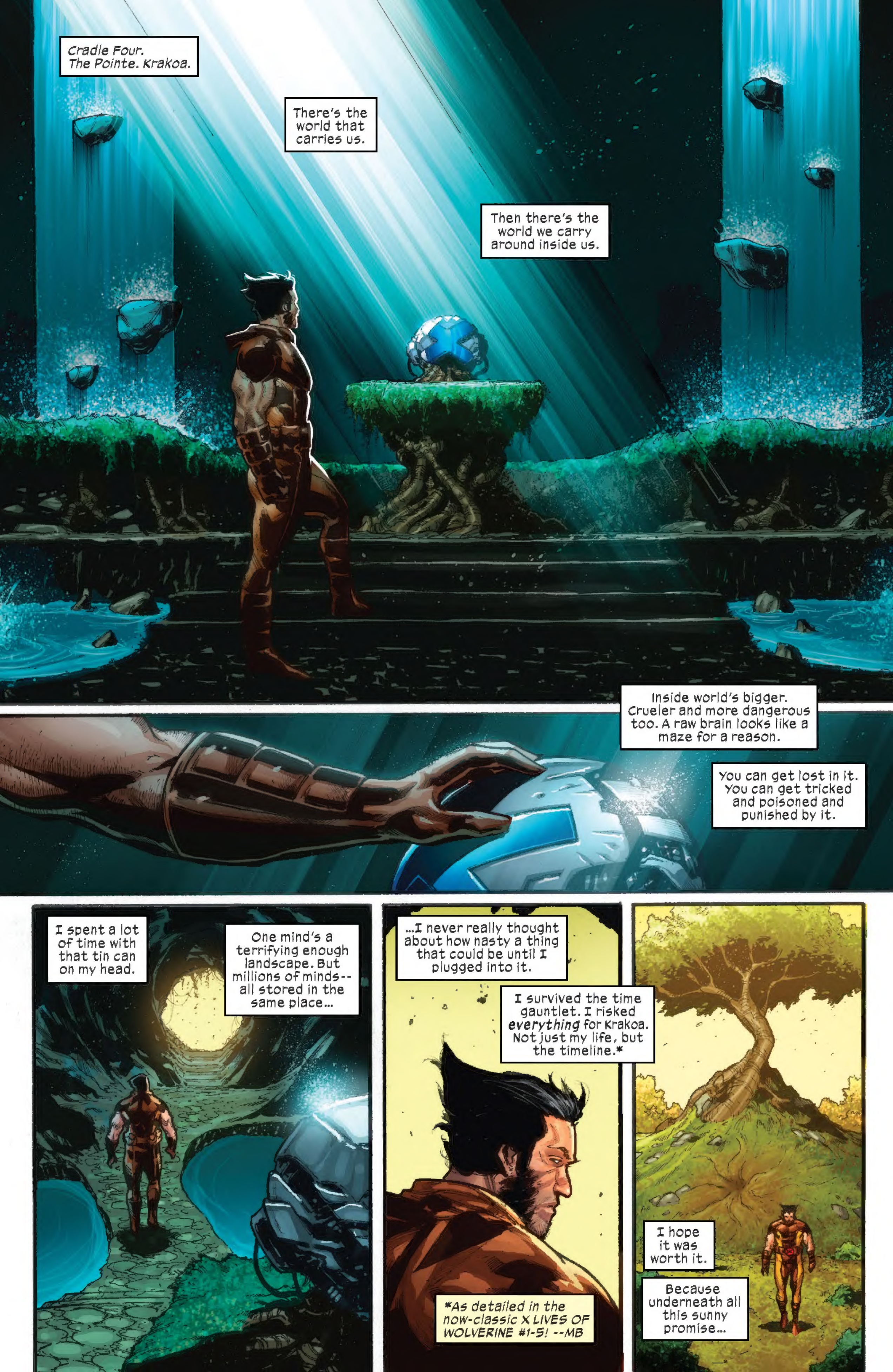
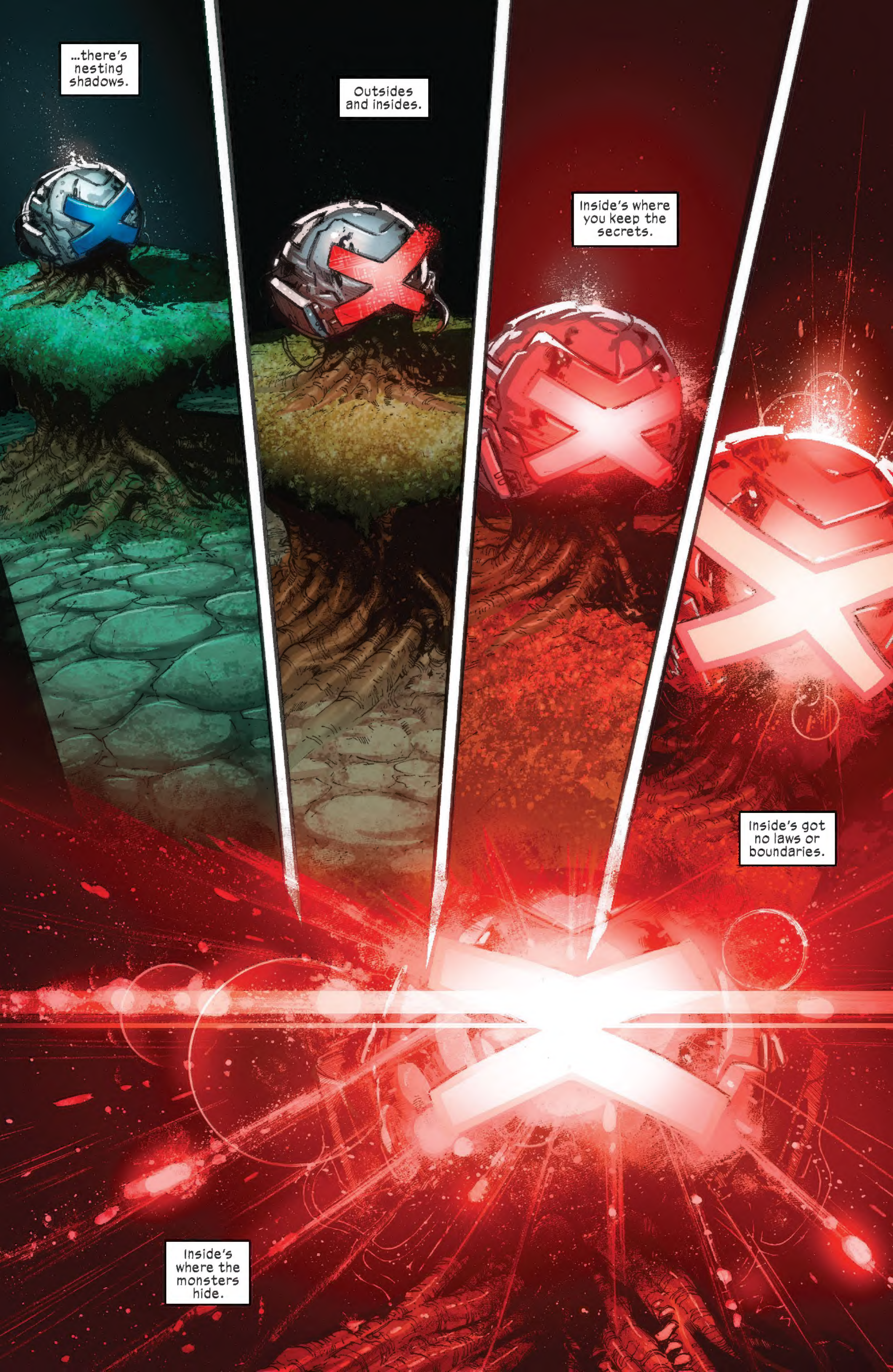

Cradle Four.
The Pointe. Krakoa.
There's the world that carries us.
Then there's the world we carry around inside us.
Inside world's bigger. Crueler and more dangerous too. A raw brain looks like a maze for a reason.
You can get lost in it. You can get tricked and poisoned and punished by it.
I spent a lot of time with that tin can on my head.
One mind's a terrifying enough landscape. But millions of minds-- all stored in the same place...
...I never really thought about how nasty a thing that could be until I plugged into it.
I survived the time gauntlet. I risked *everything* for Krakoa. Not just my life, but the timeline.*
*As detailed in the now-classic X LIVES OF WOLVERINE #1-5! --MB
I hope it was worth it.
Because underneath all this sunny promise...


...there's nesting shadows.
Outsides and insides.
Inside's where you keep the secrets.
Inside's got no laws or boundaries.
Inside's where the monsters hide.

JDC
DVW

From Cradle to Grave

27

X-FORCE

ONLINE

When a time-traveling Omega Red attempted to erase Charles Xavier from history, Wolverine donned a Cerebro helmet to send his own consciousness back in time. To aid in the fight, Xavier made the unprecedented move to network all backup Cerebro helmets with his own. Wolverine succeeded in stopping Omega Red, but the true cost of that victory remains to be seen...

[WOLVERINE]

[BEAST]

[COLOSSUS]

[XAVIER]

[DOMINO]

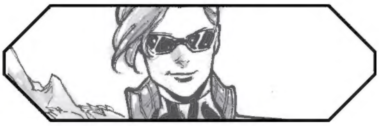
[SAGE]

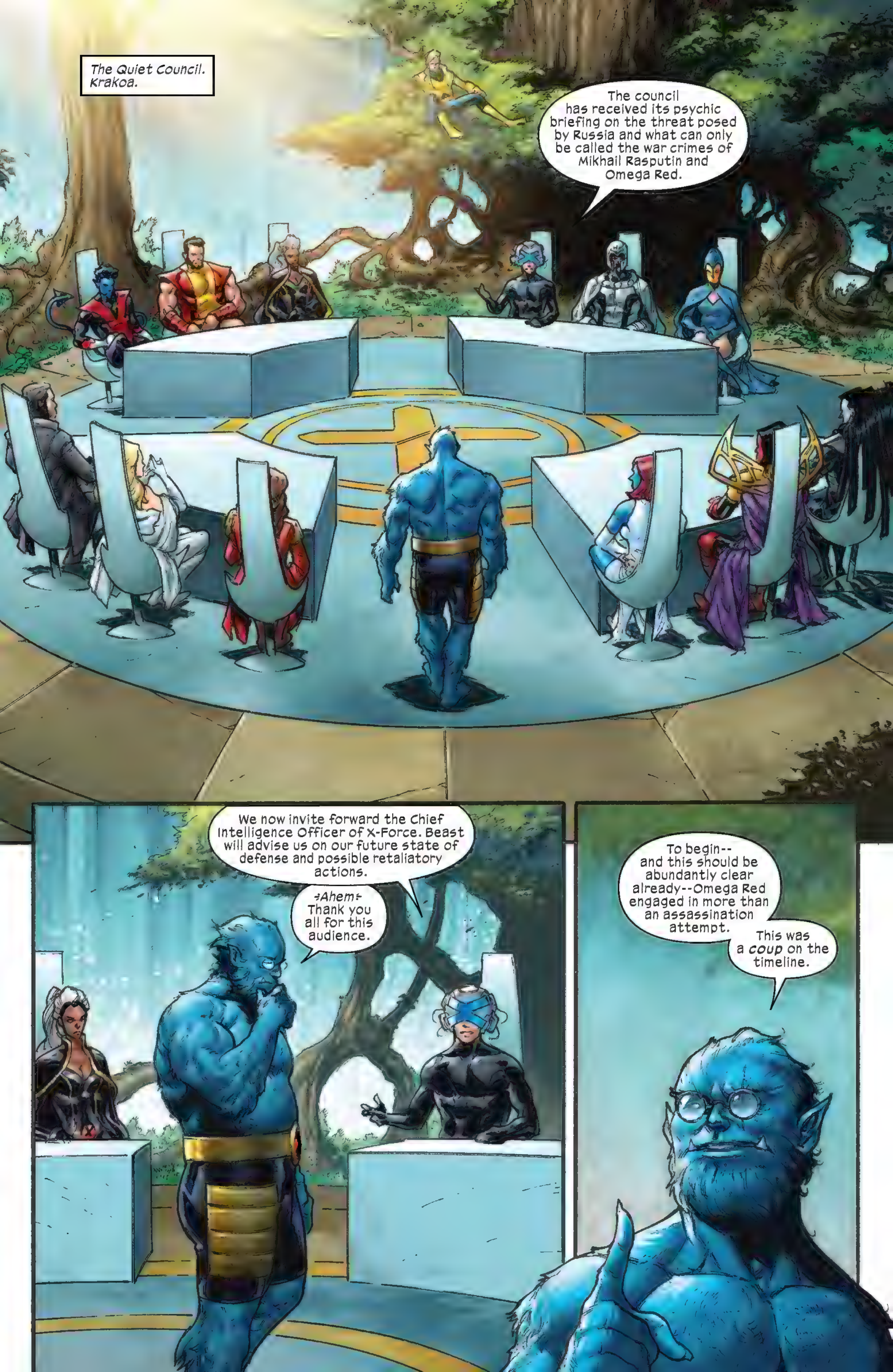
[BLACK TOM]

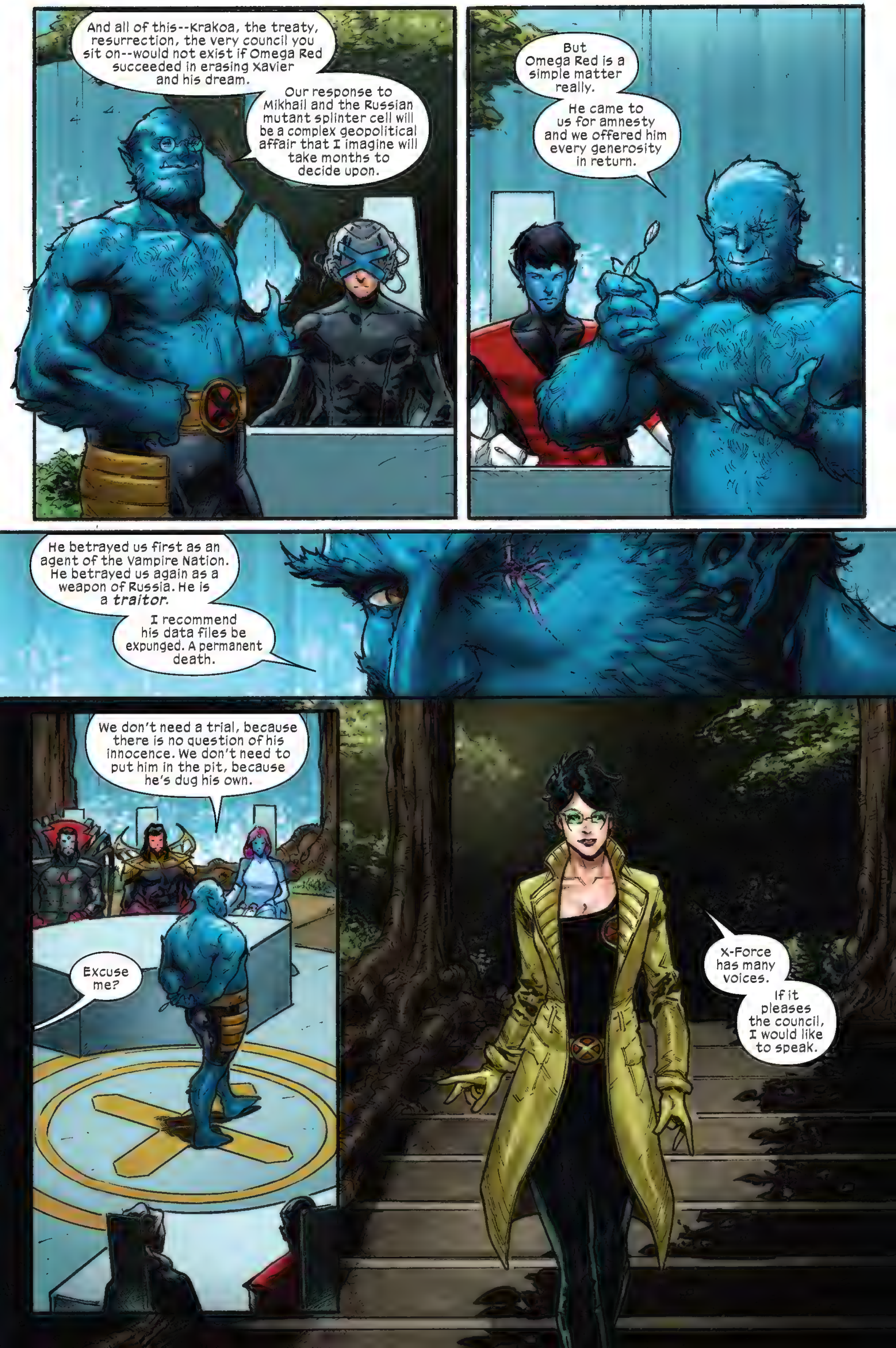
[FORGE]

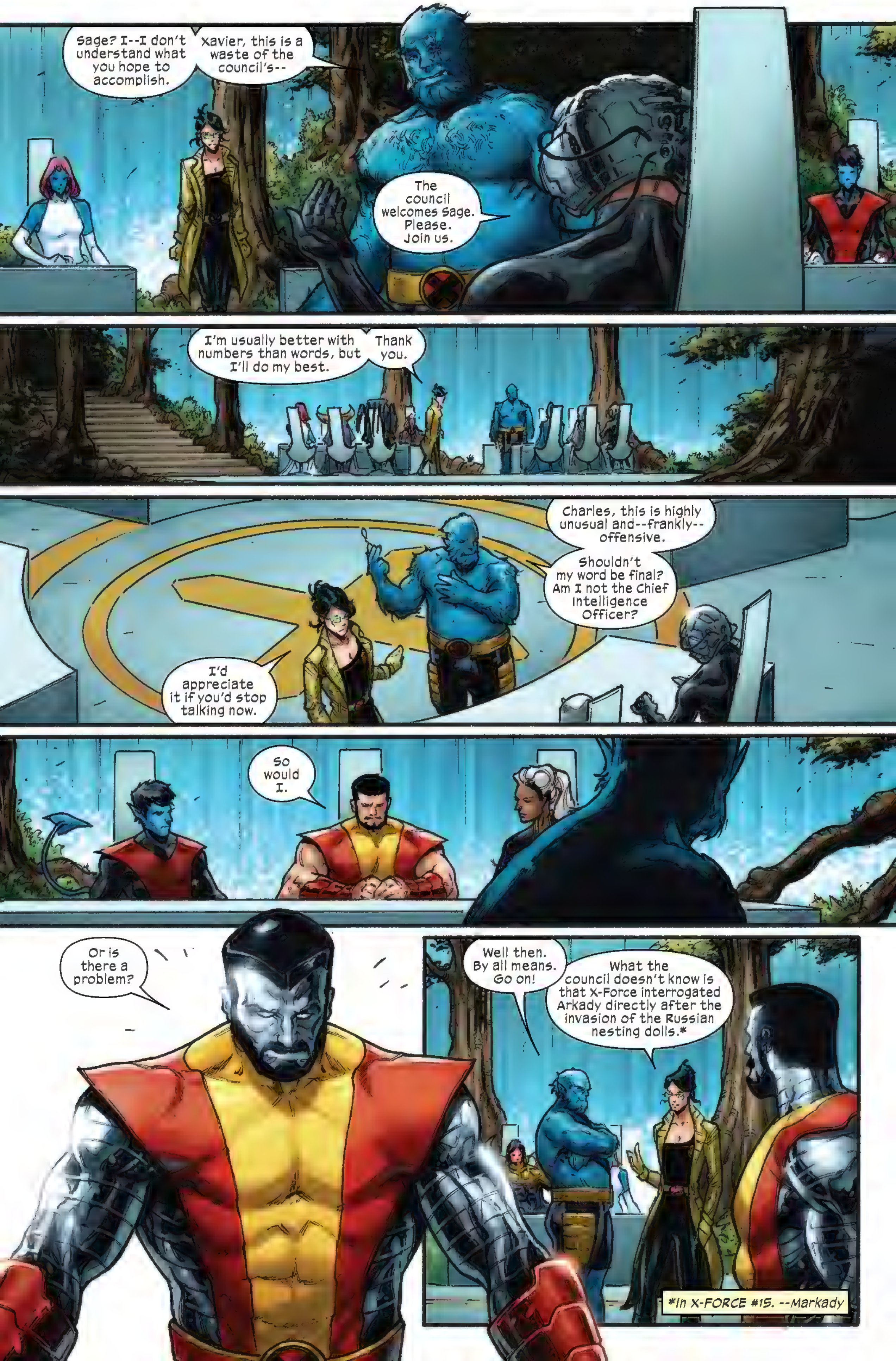
[OMEGA RED]

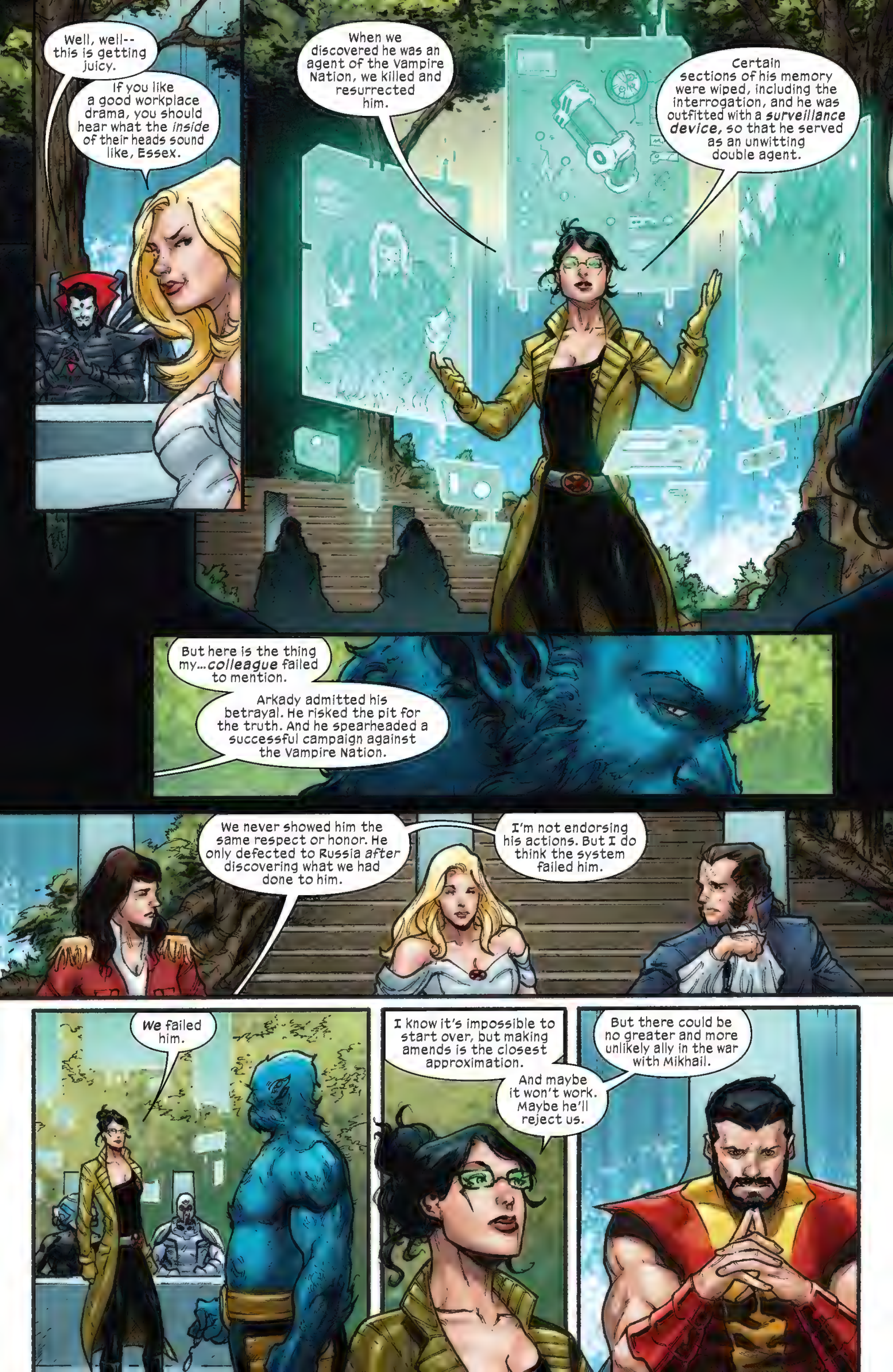
[KID OMEGA]

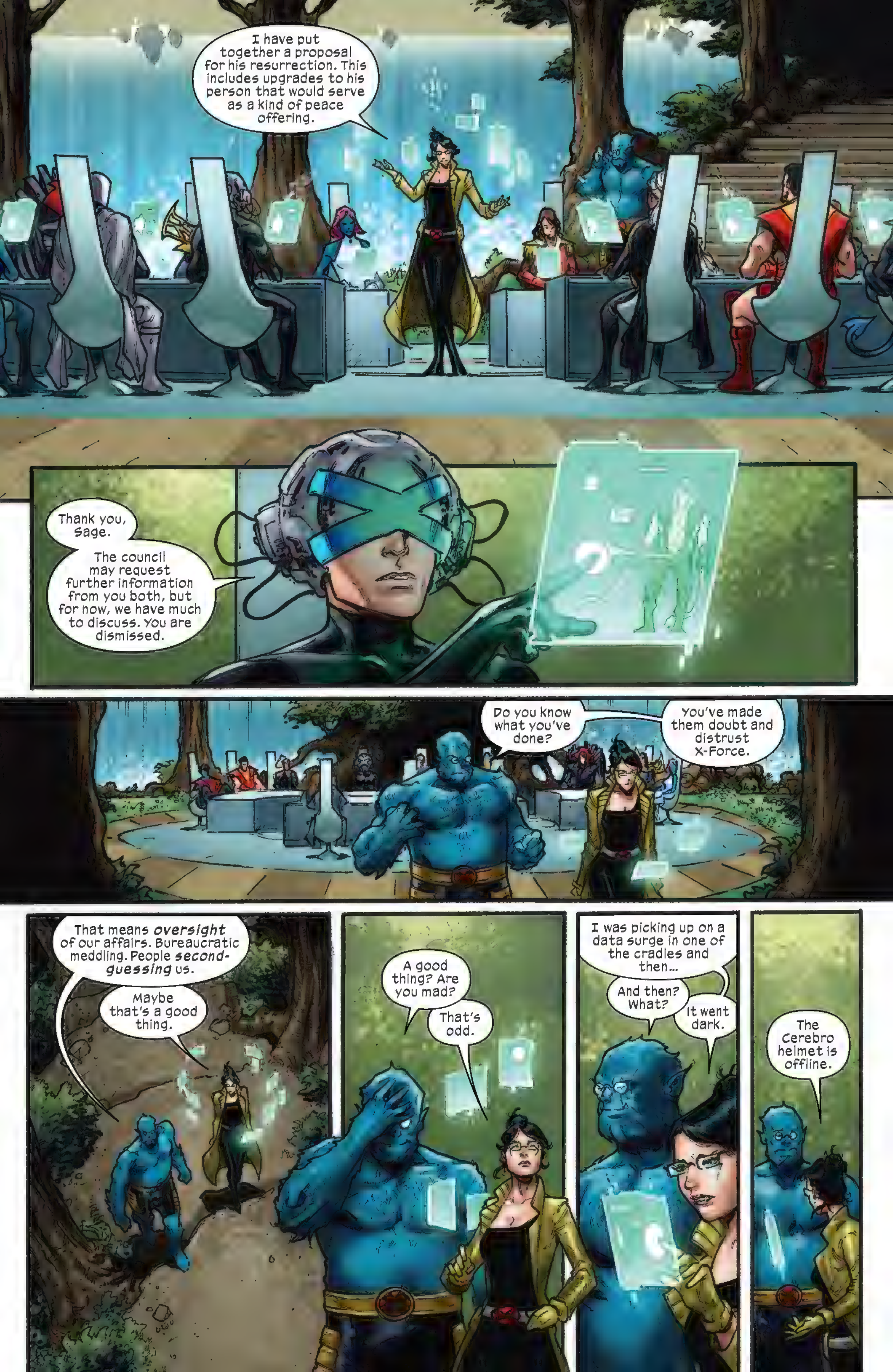

[ABIGAIL BRAND]


The Quiet Council. Krakoa.
The council has received its psychic briefing on the threat posed by Russia and what can only be called the war crimes of Mikhail Rasputin and Omega Red.
We now invite forward the Chief Intelligence Officer of X-Force. Beast will advise us on our future state of defense and possible retaliatory actions.
Ahem Thank you all for this audience.
To begin-- and this should be abundantly clear already--Omega Red engaged in more than an assassination attempt.
This was a *coup* on the timeline.


And all of this--Krakoa, the treaty, resurrection, the very council you sit on--would not exist if Omega Red succeeded in erasing Xavier and his dream.
Our response to Mikhail and the Russian mutant splinter cell will be a complex geopolitical affair that I imagine will take months to decide upon.
But Omega Red is a simple matter really.
He came to us for amnesty and we offered him every generosity in return.
He betrayed us first as an agent of the Vampire Nation. He betrayed us again as a weapon of Russia. He is a *traitor.*
I recommend his data files be expunged. A permanent death.
We don't need a trial, because there is no question of his innocence. We don't need to put him in the pit, because he's dug his own.
Excuse me?
X-Force has many voices.
If it pleases the council, I would like to speak.


Sage? I--I don't understand what you hope to accomplish.
Xavier, this is a waste of the council's--
The council welcomes Sage. Please. Join us.
I'm usually better with numbers than words, but I'll do my best.
Thank you.
Charles, this is highly unusual and--frankly--offensive.
Shouldn't my word be final? Am I not the Chief Intelligence Officer?
I'd appreciate it if you'd stop talking now.
So would I.
Or is there a problem?
Well then. By all means. Go on!
What the council doesn't know is that X-Force interrogated Arkady directly after the invasion of the Russian nesting dolls.*
*In X-FORCE #15. --Markady


Well, well-- this is getting juicy.
If you like a good workplace drama, you should hear what the *inside* of their heads sound like, Essex.
When we discovered he was an agent of the Vampire Nation, we killed and resurrected him.
Certain sections of his memory were wiped, including the interrogation, and he was outfitted with a *surveillance device,* so that he served as an unwitting double agent.
But here is the thing my...*colleague* failed to mention.
Arkady admitted his betrayal. He risked the pit for the truth. And he spearheaded a successful campaign against the Vampire Nation.
We never showed him the same respect or honor. He only defected to Russia *after* discovering what we had done to him.
I'm not endorsing his actions. But I do think the system failed him.
We failed him.
I know it's impossible to start over, but making amends is the closest approximation.
And maybe it won't work. Maybe he'll reject us.
But there could be no greater and more unlikely ally in the war with Mikhail.


I have put together a proposal for his resurrection. This includes upgrades to his person that would serve as a kind of peace offering.
Thank you, Sage.
The council may request further information from you both, but for now, we have much to discuss. You are dismissed.
Do you know what you've done?
You've made them doubt and distrust X-Force.
That means *oversight* of our affairs. Bureaucratic meddling. People *second-guessing* us.
Maybe that's a good thing.
A good thing? Are you mad?
That's odd.
I was picking up on a data surge in one of the cradles and then...
And then? What?
It went dark.
The Cerebro helmet is offline.

FORGE'S LOGBOOK: OMEGA RED

Addendum: resurrection protocols

<in coordination with Sage>
<in coordination with the Five>

Mainline items:

Carbonadium synthesizer*
:::eradication of surveillance monitor:::
:::fungal implant to assist in leaching off carbonadium poisoning:::

Tech tentacles
:::coordinated with Sage's network:::
:::multi-port system for retrieval or upload of data:::

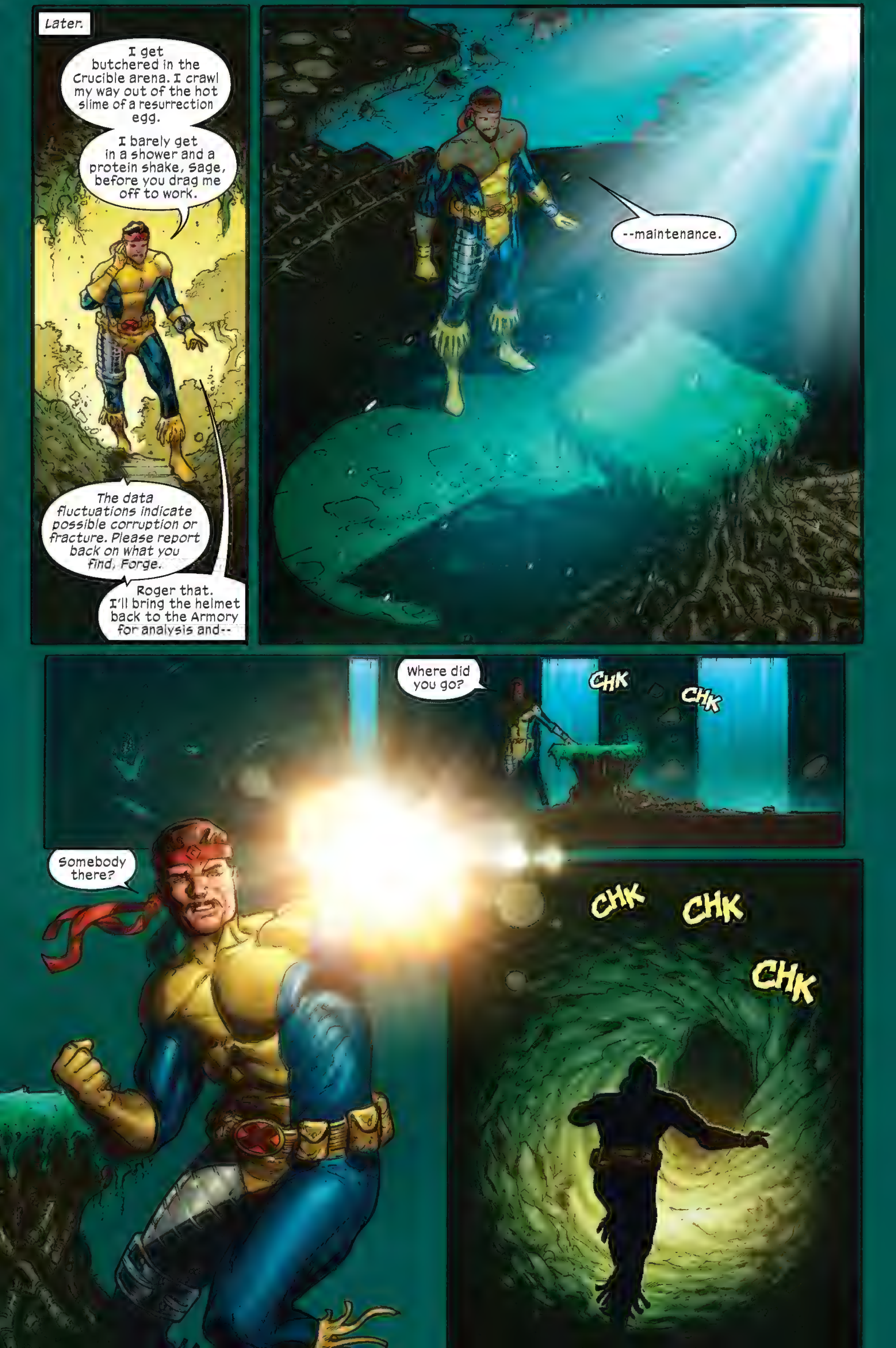
<<specs forthcoming>>

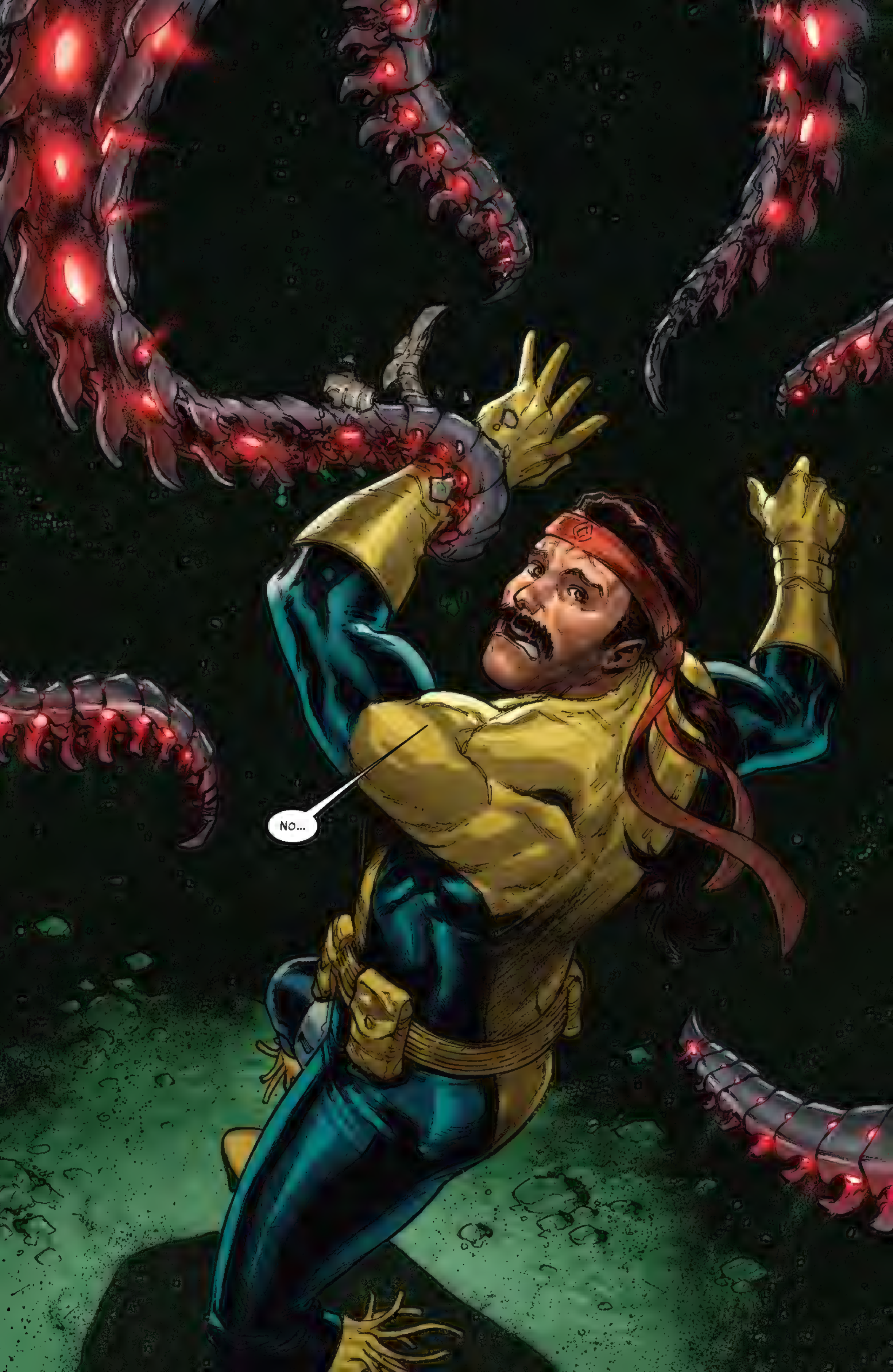
*There was some discussion about replacing the need for the carbonadium synthesizer altogether, but for now we're opting not to drastically alter his biology without permission.

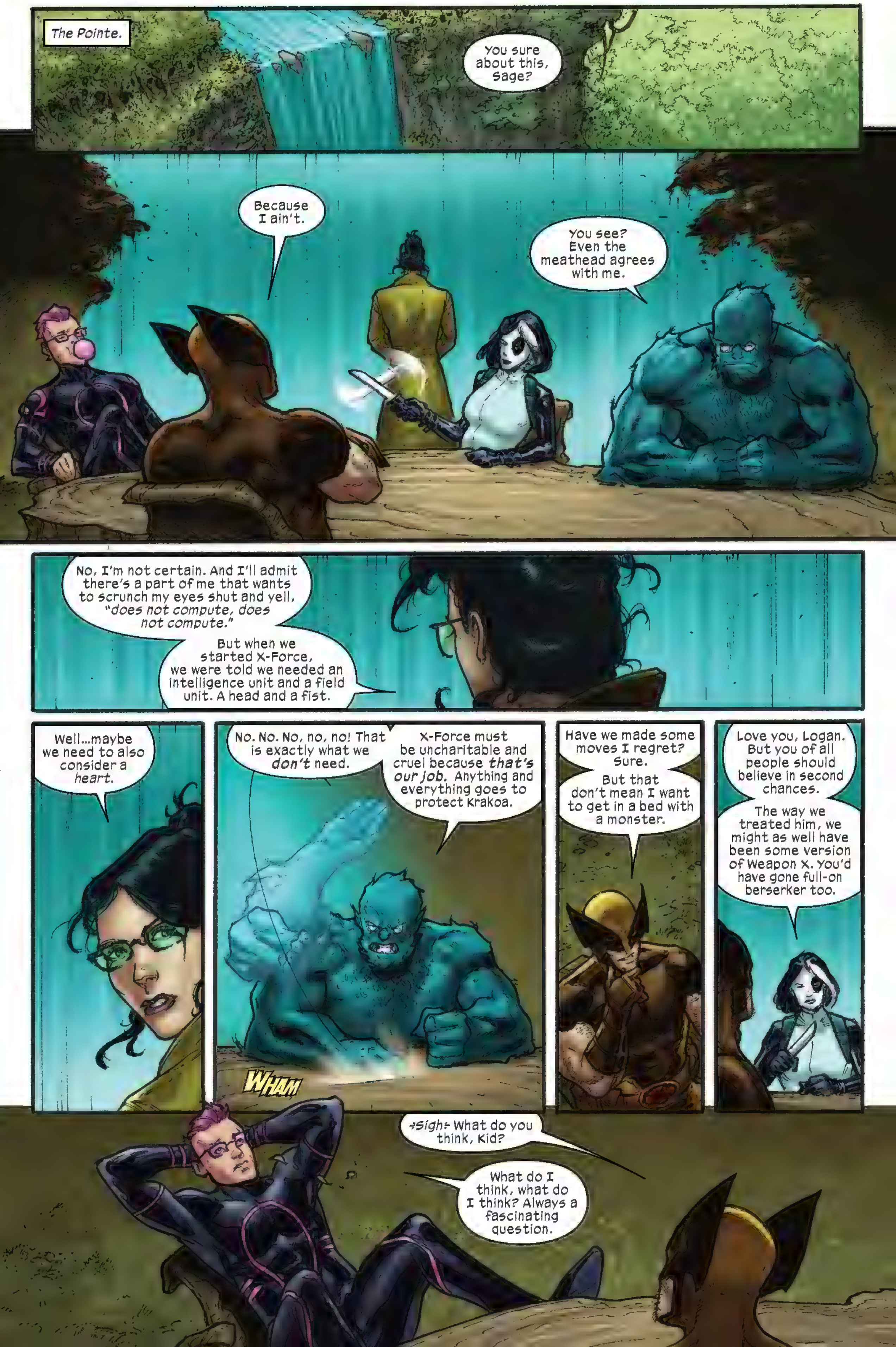
Query: (Attn: X-Force):

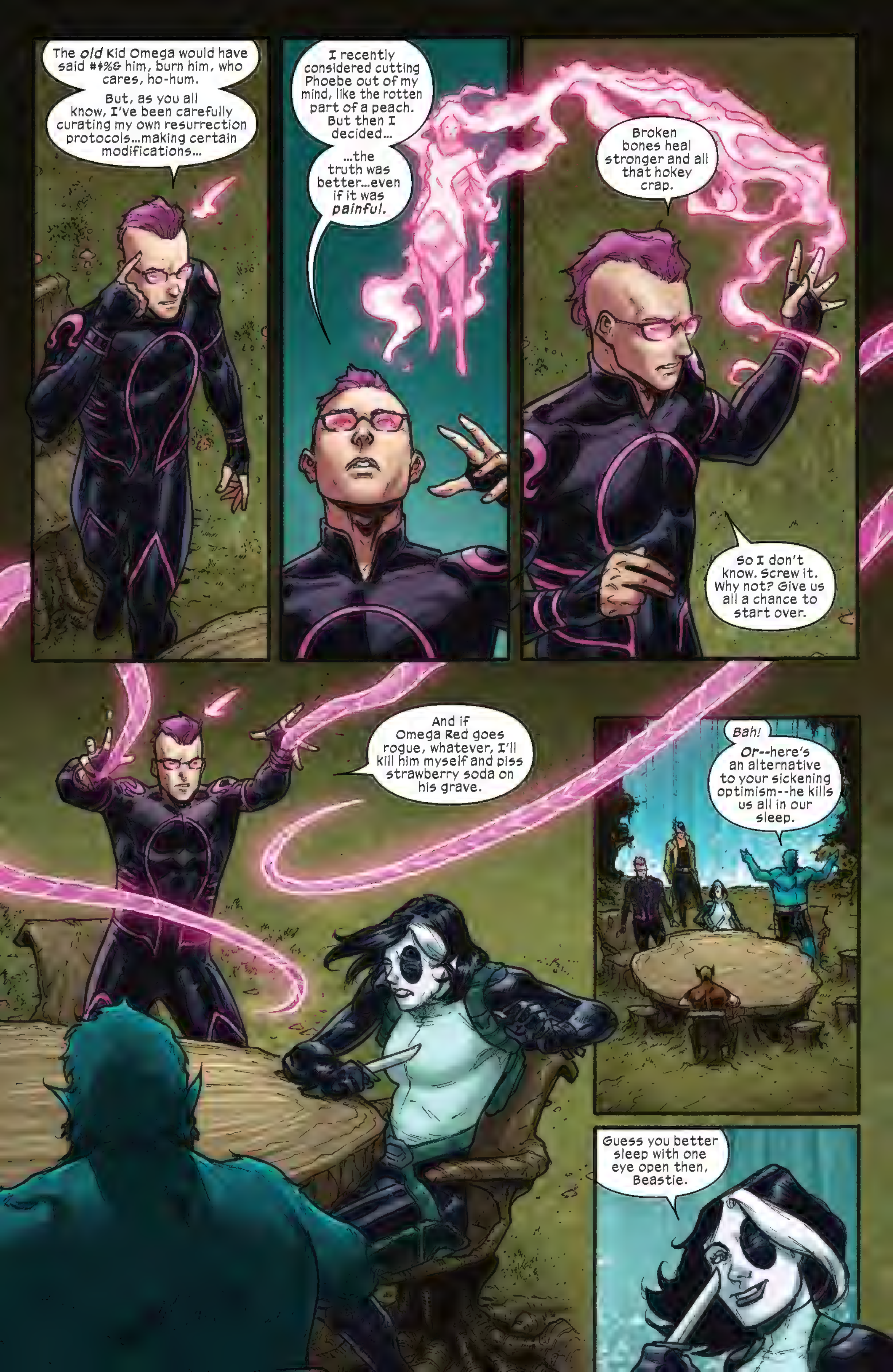
This is a free will situation, yeah? Meaning...Arkady can go if he chooses? Because we can't exactly hold him hostage. Or is this the sort of situation where if he wakes up and says #$@% all of you, we exterminate him? Toss him in the pit? I know I'm just the monkey wrench repairman, but it's kind of an important thing to chew on.

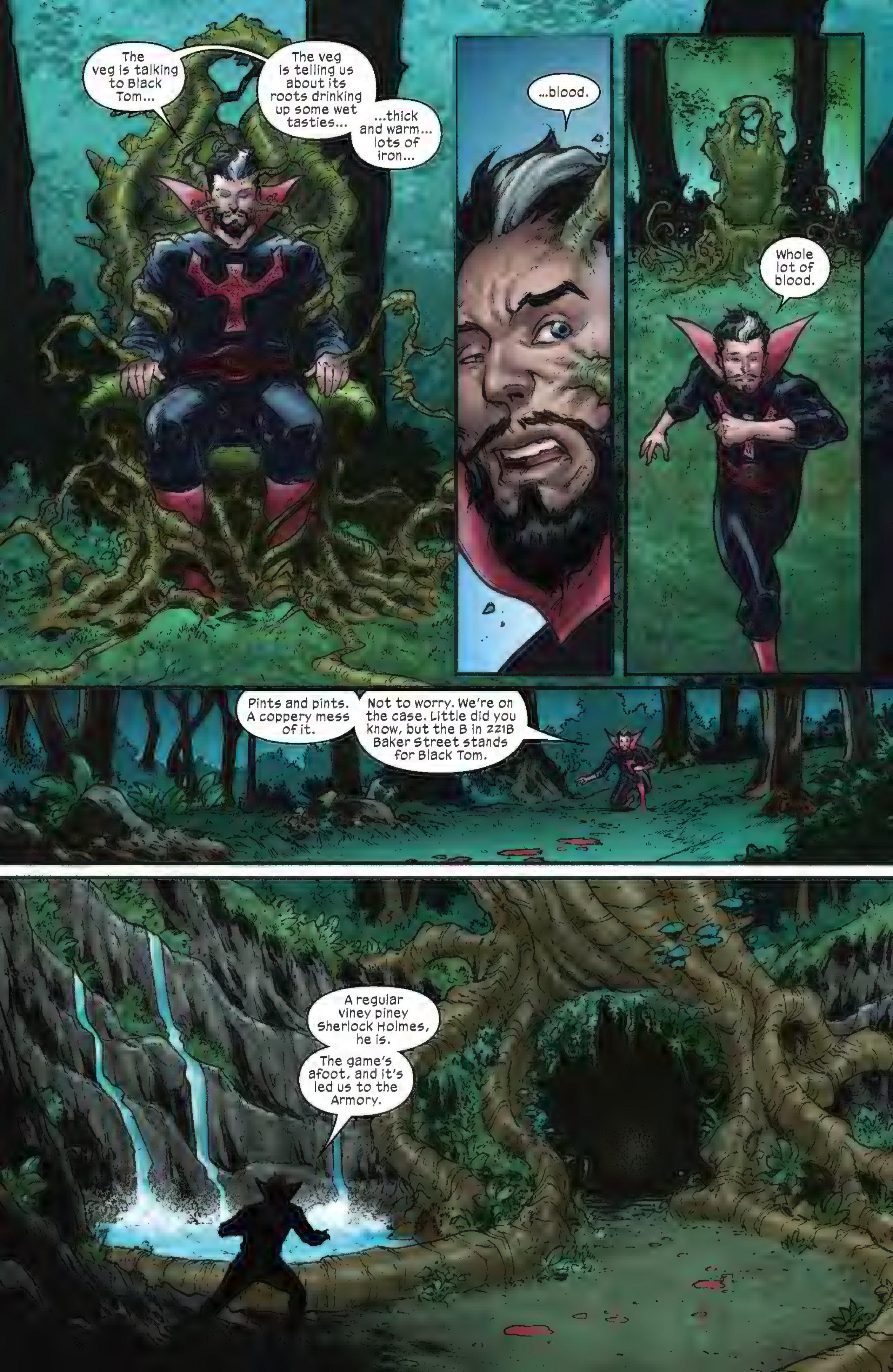
> **Reply: (Author: Beast):**
>
> This is on Sage.
>
> > **Reply: (Author: Sage):**
> >
> > I hope you can trust me on this one, Forge. I'm not arguing that Omega Red isn't dangerous. I'm arguing that we can harness that danger.

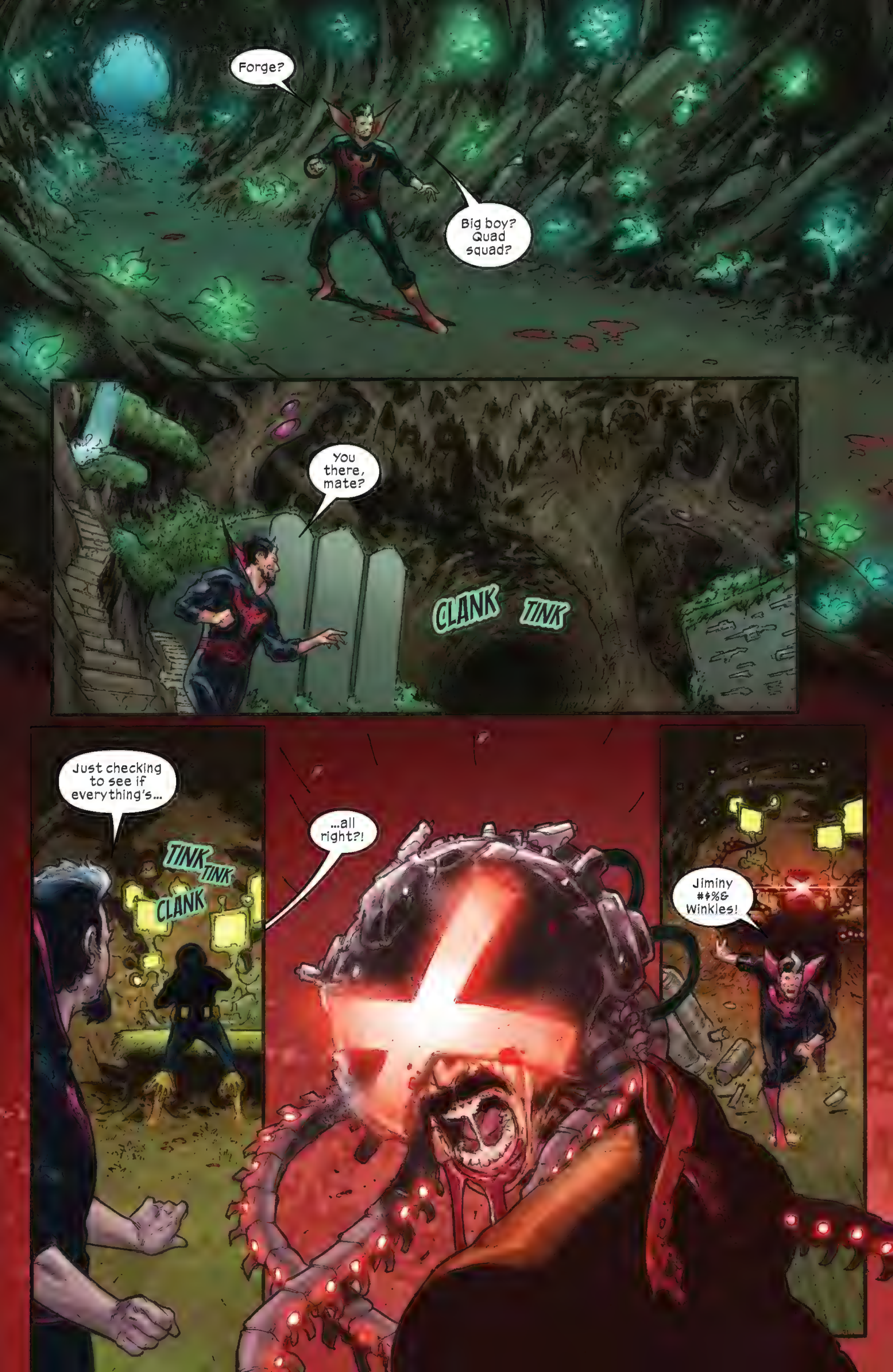

Later.
I get butchered in the Crucible arena. I crawl my way out of the hot slime of a resurrection egg.
I barely get in a shower and a protein shake, Sage, before you drag me off to work.
The data fluctuations indicate possible corruption or fracture. Please report back on what you find, Forge.
Roger that. I'll bring the helmet back to the Armory for analysis and--
--maintenance.
Where did you go?
CHK
CHK
Somebody there?
CHK
CHK
CHK

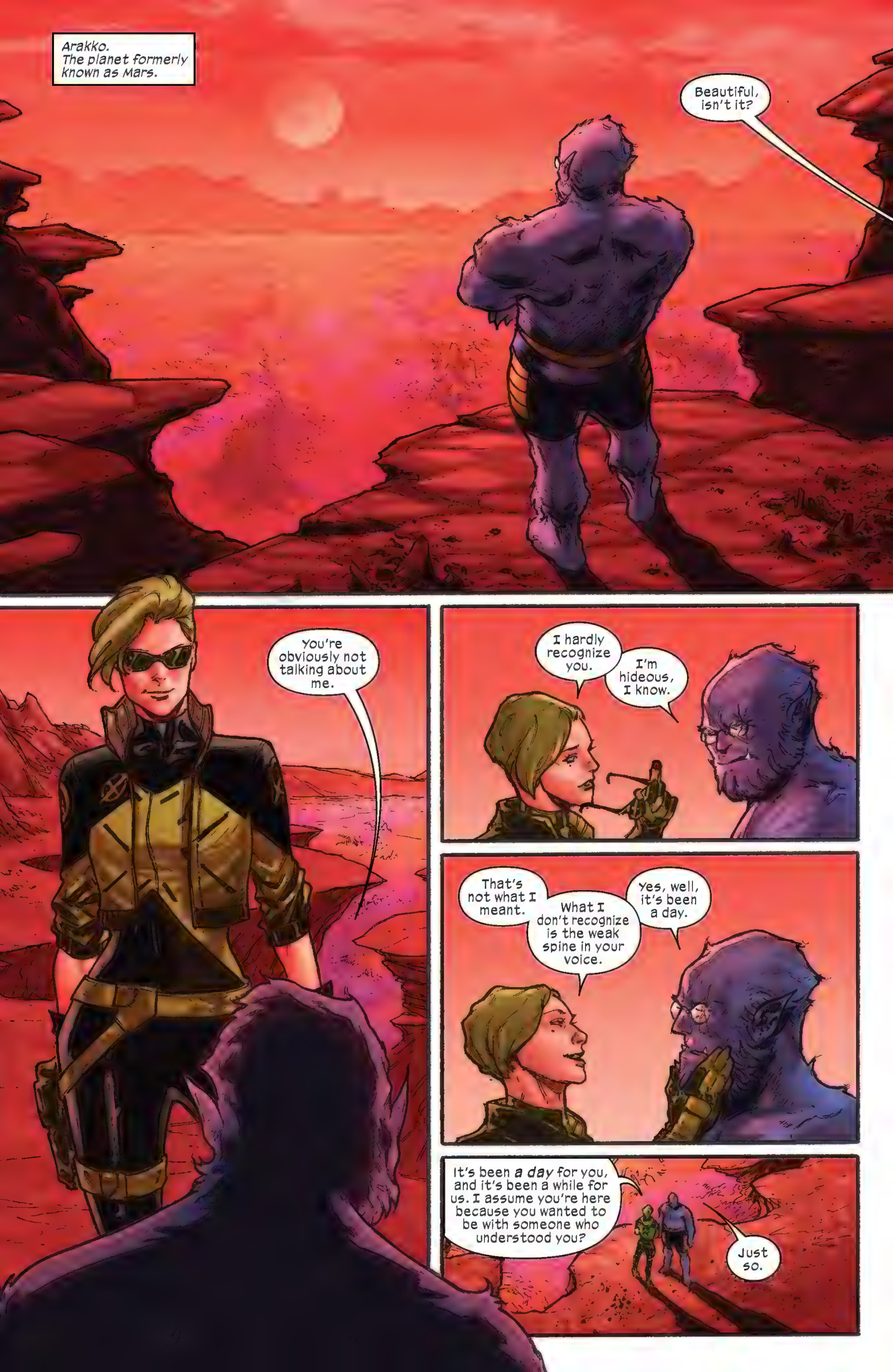

NO...

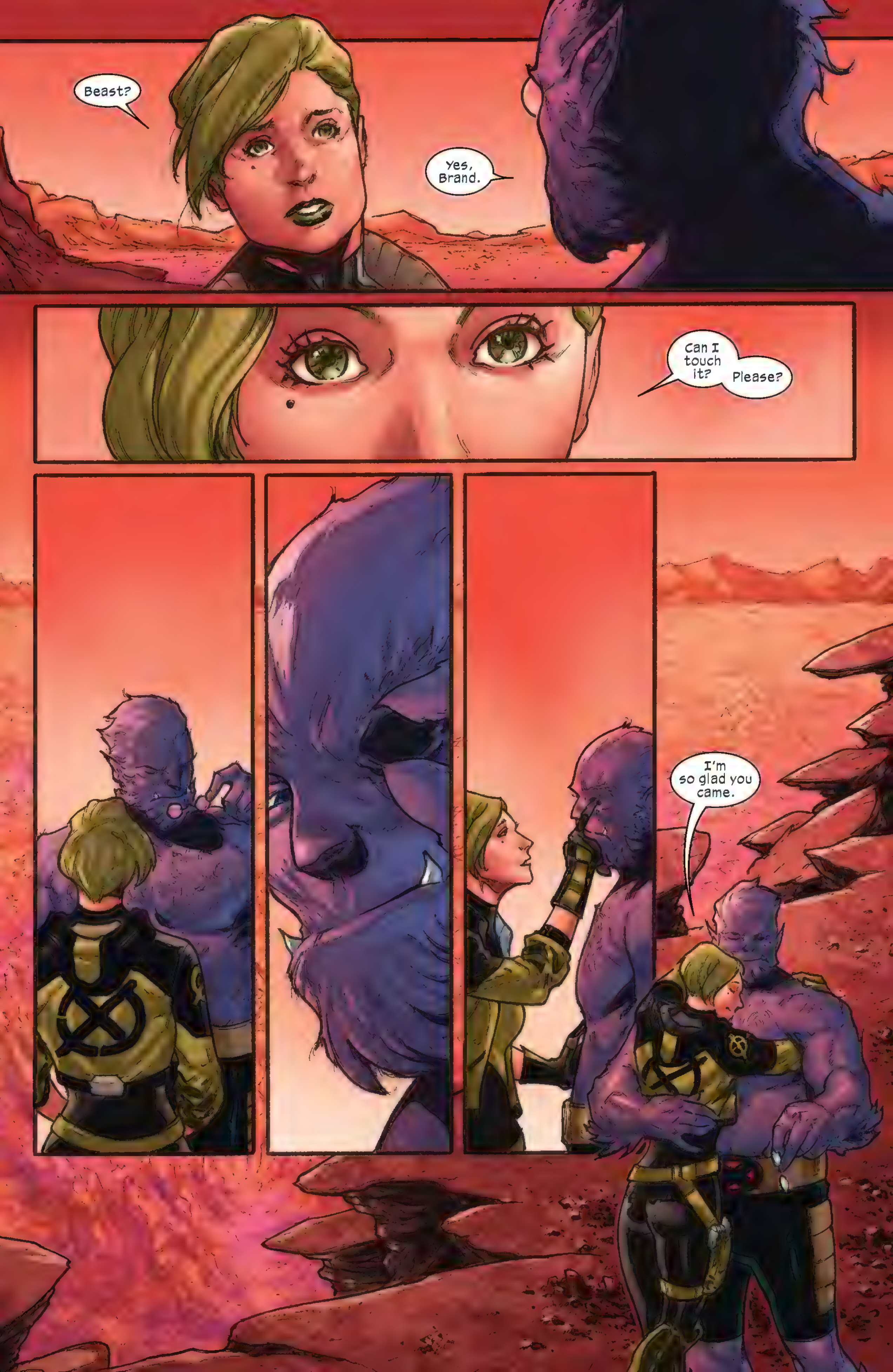

The Pointe.
You sure about this, Sage?
Because I ain't.
You see? Even the meathead agrees with me.
No, I'm not certain. And I'll admit there's a part of me that wants to scrunch my eyes shut and yell, "*does not compute, does not compute.*"
But when we started X-Force, we were told we needed an intelligence unit and a field unit. A head and a fist.
Well...maybe we need to also consider a *heart.*
No. No. No, no, no! That is exactly what we *don't* need.
X-Force must be uncharitable and cruel because *that's our job.* Anything and everything goes to protect Krakoa.
WHAM
Have we made some moves I regret? Sure.
But that don't mean I want to get in a bed with a monster.
Love you, Logan. But you of all people should believe in second chances.
The way we treated him, we might as well have been some version of Weapon X. You'd have gone full-on berserker too.
Sigh What do you think, Kid?
What do I think, what do I think? Always a fascinating question.


The *old* Kid Omega would have said #$%& him, burn him, who cares, ho-hum.
But, as you all know, I've been carefully curating my own resurrection protocols...making certain modifications...
I recently considered cutting Phoebe out of my mind, like the rotten part of a peach. But then I decided...
...the truth was better...even if it was *painful.*
Broken bones heal stronger and all that hokey crap.
So I don't know. Screw it. Why not? Give us all a chance to start over.
And if Omega Red goes rogue, whatever, I'll kill him myself and piss strawberry soda on his grave.
Bah!
Or--here's an alternative to your sickening optimism--he kills us all in our sleep.
Guess you better sleep with one eye open then, Beastie.


The veg is talking to Black Tom...
The veg is telling us about its roots drinking up some wet tasties...
...thick and warm... lots of iron...
...blood.
Whole lot of blood.
Pints and pints. A coppery mess of it.
Not to worry. We're on the case. Little did you know, but the B in 221B Baker Street stands for Black Tom.
A regular viney piney Sherlock Holmes, he is.
The game's afoot, and it's led us to the Armory.


Forge?
Big boy? Quad squad?
You there, mate?
CLANK
TINK
Just checking to see if everything's...
TINK
TINK
CLANK
...all right?!
Jiminy #$%& Winkles!


Arakko.
The planet formerly known as Mars.
Beautiful, isn't it?
You're obviously not talking about me.
I hardly recognize you.
I'm hideous, I know.
That's not what I meant.
What I don't recognize is the weak spine in your voice.
Yes, well, it's been a day.
It's been *a day* for you, and it's been a while for us. I assume you're here because you wanted to be with someone who understood you?
Just so.

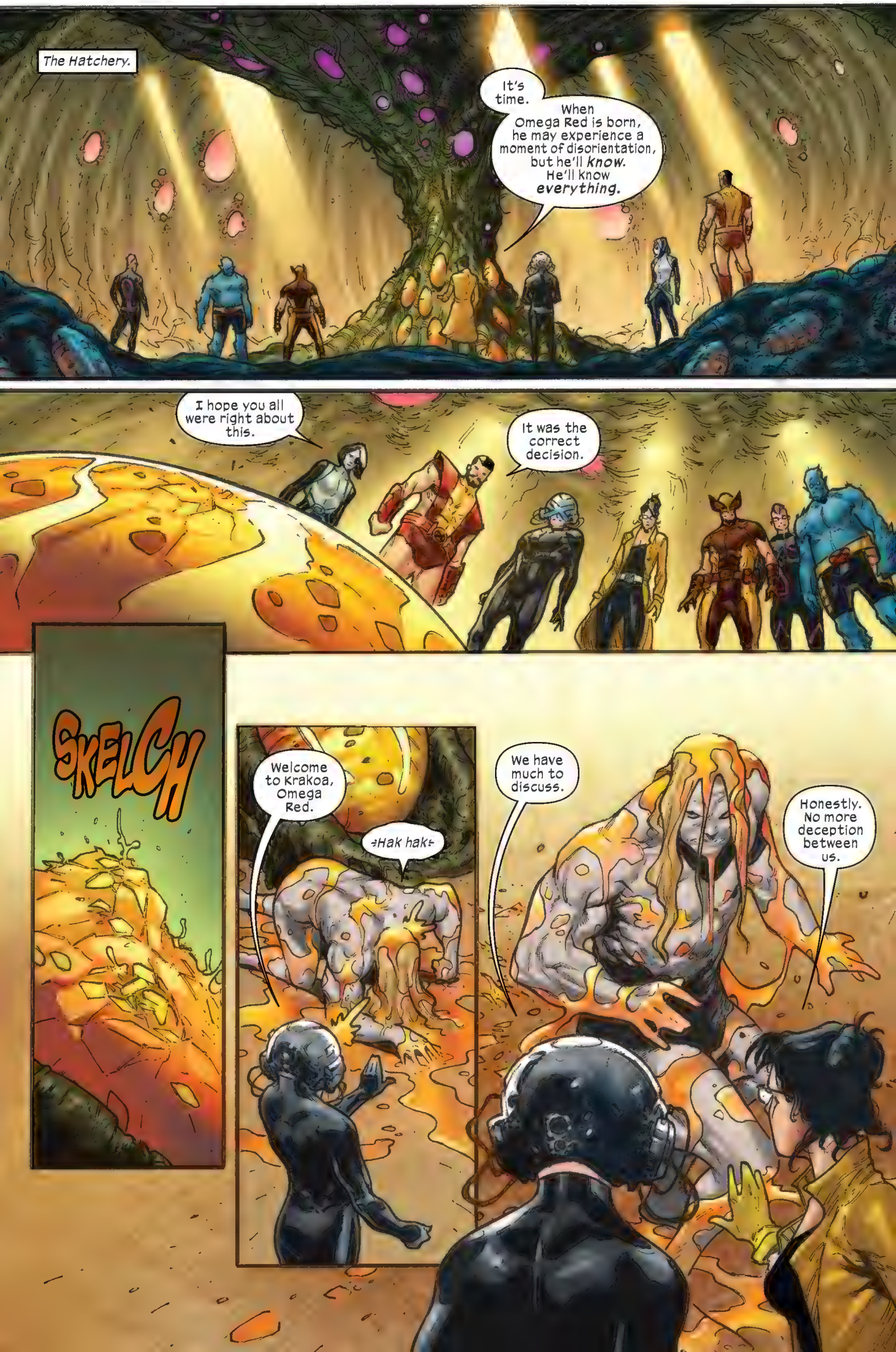

Beast?
Yes, Brand.
Can I touch it? Please?
I'm so glad you came.

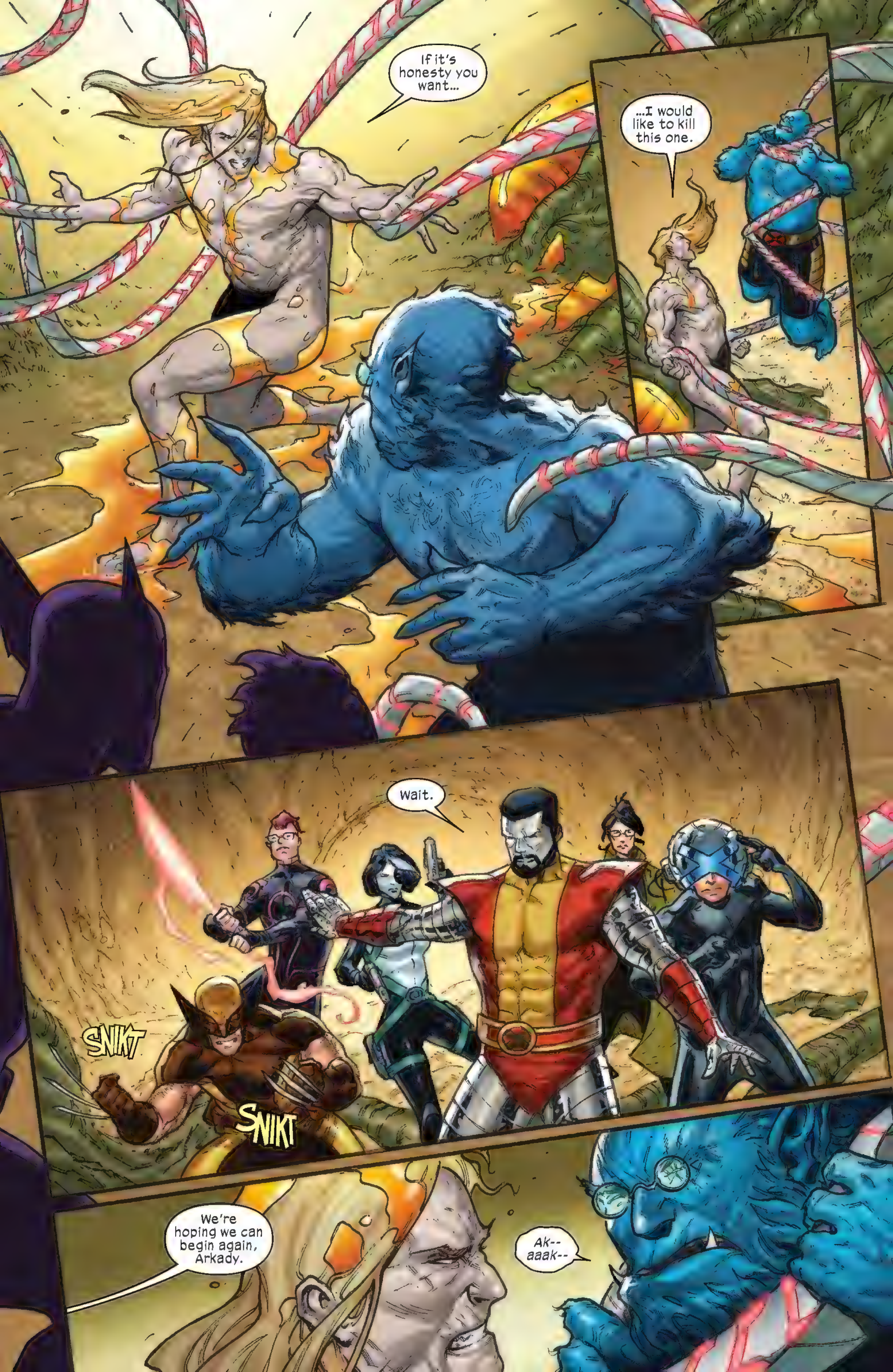
[piotr…………[0.X]
[rasputin…[0.X]

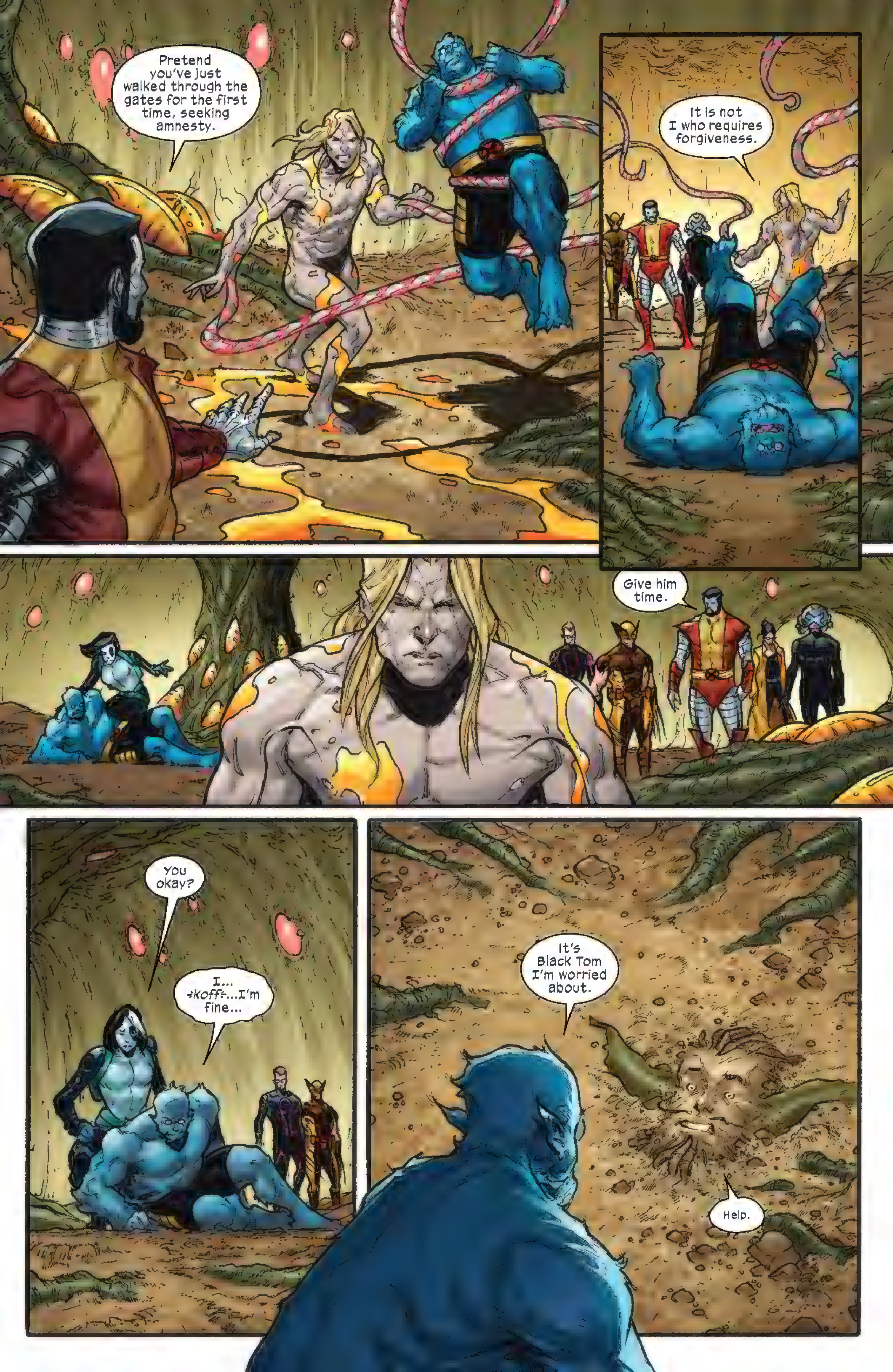
"I strongly believe we should take a chance with Omega Red. The more Russian mutants we have on Krakoa, the better our chances -- whether we are speaking of war or diplomacy."

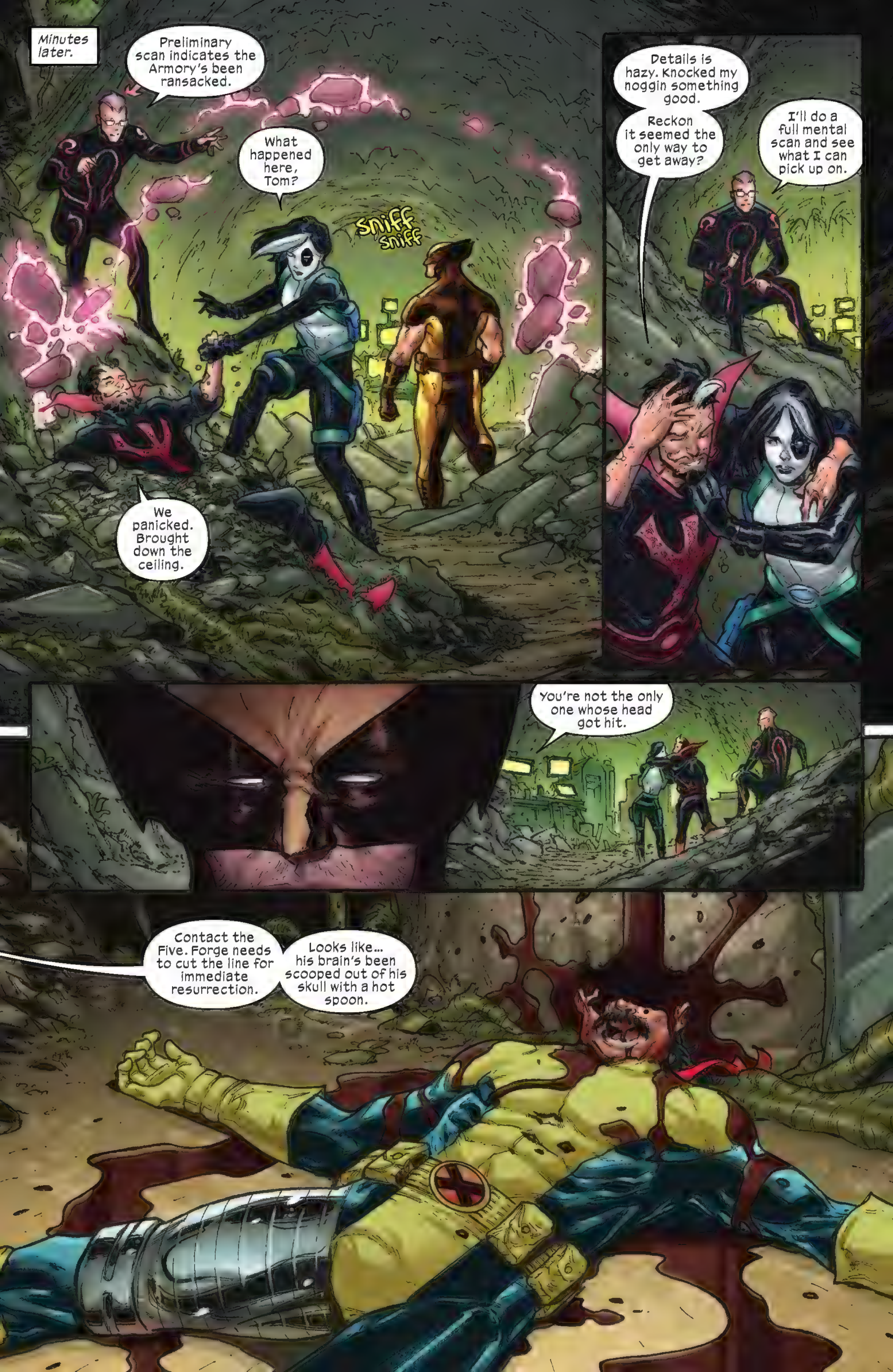
-- COLOSSUS

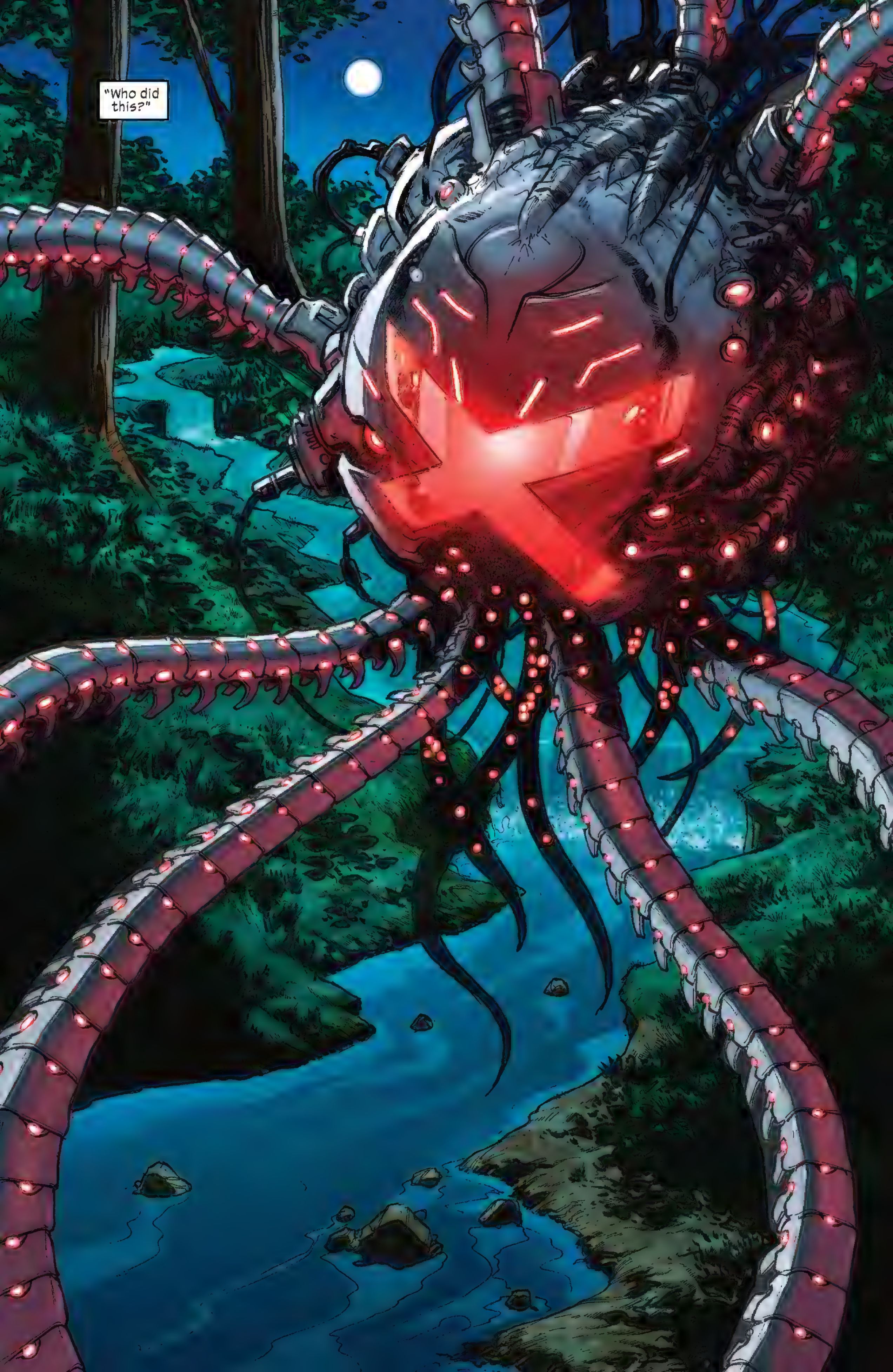
[piotr…………[0.X]
[rasputin…[0.X]

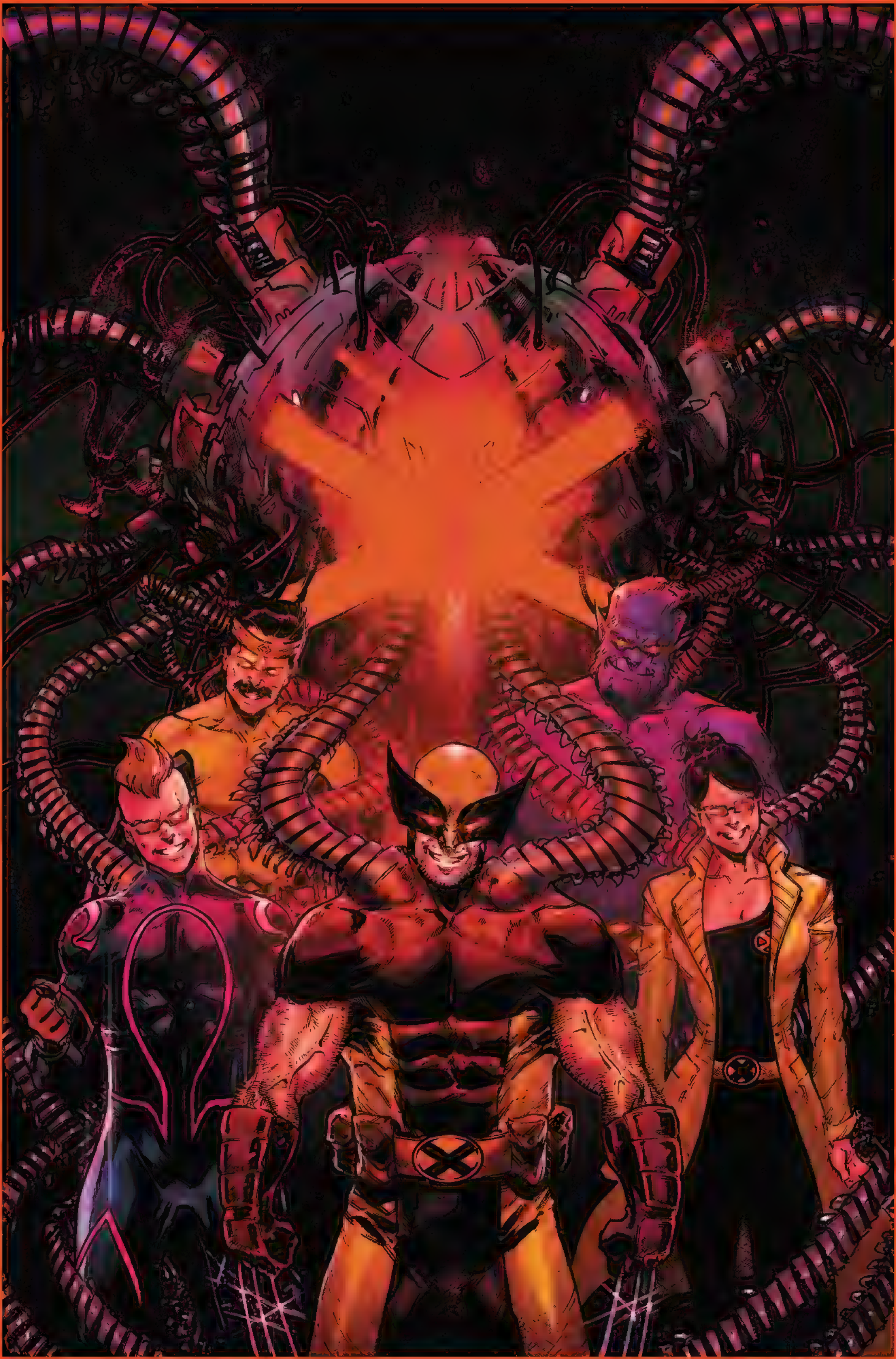

The Hatchery.
It's time.
When Omega Red is born, he may experience a moment of disorientation, but he'll *know*. He'll know *everything*.
I hope you all were right about this.
It was the correct decision.
SKELCH
Welcome to Krakoa, Omega Red.
‡Hak hak‡
We have much to discuss.
Honestly. No more deception between us.


If it's honesty you want...
...I would like to kill this one.
Wait.
SNIKT
SNIKT
We're hoping we can begin again, Arkady.
Ak-- aaak--


Pretend you've just walked through the gates for the first time, seeking amnesty.
It is not I who requires forgiveness.
Give him time.
You okay?
I... =koff=...I'm fine...
It's Black Tom I'm worried about.
Help.


Minutes later.
Preliminary scan indicates the Armory's been ransacked.
What happened here, Tom?
SNIFF SNIFF
We panicked. Brought down the ceiling.
Details is hazy. Knocked my noggin something good.
Reckon it seemed the only way to get away?
I'll do a full mental scan and see what I can pick up on.
You're not the only one whose head got hit.
Contact the Five. Forge needs to cut the line for immediate resurrection.
Looks like... his brain's been scooped out of his skull with a hot spoon.


"Who did this?"



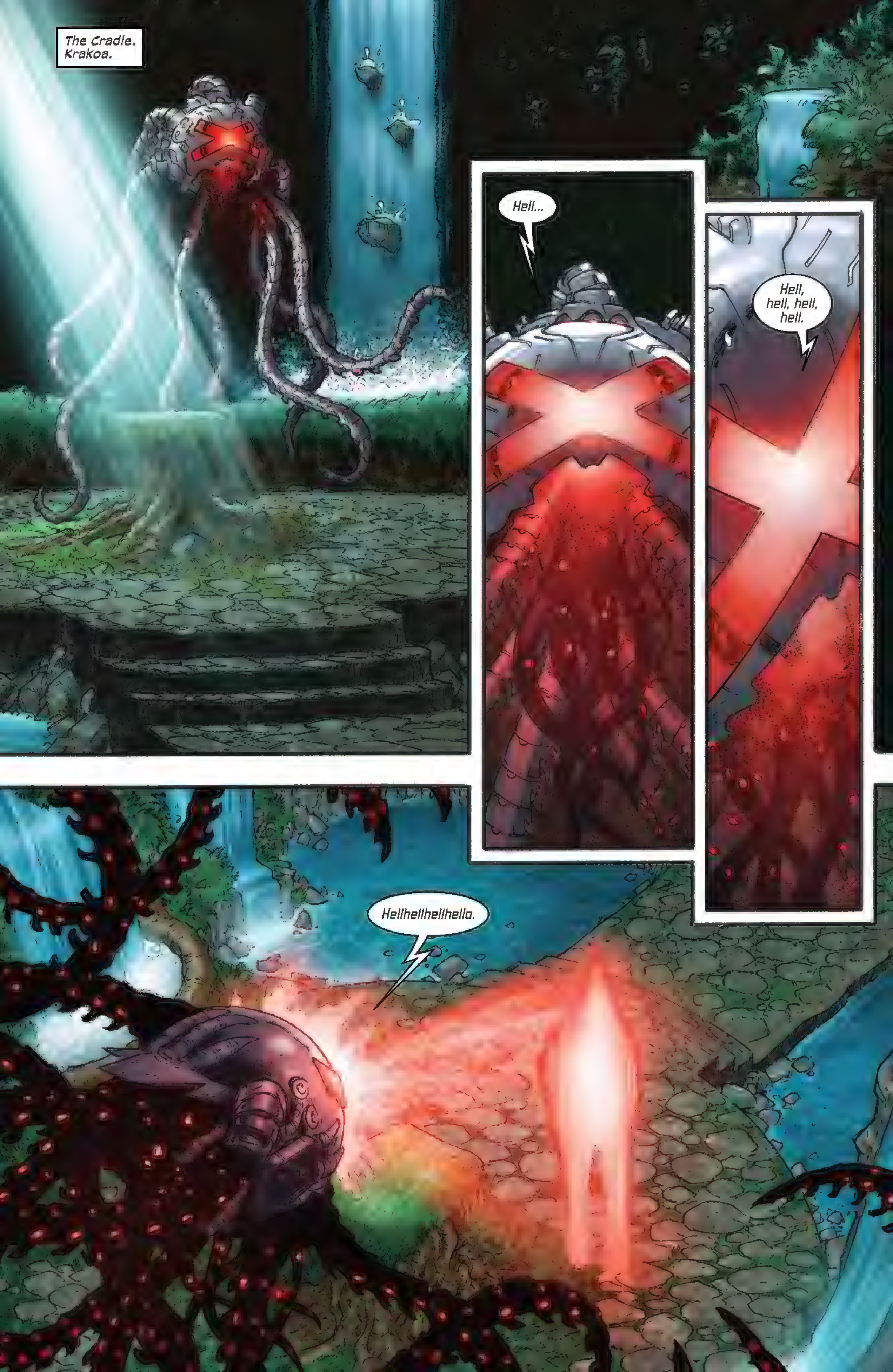
X-Force #27 Teaser Variant

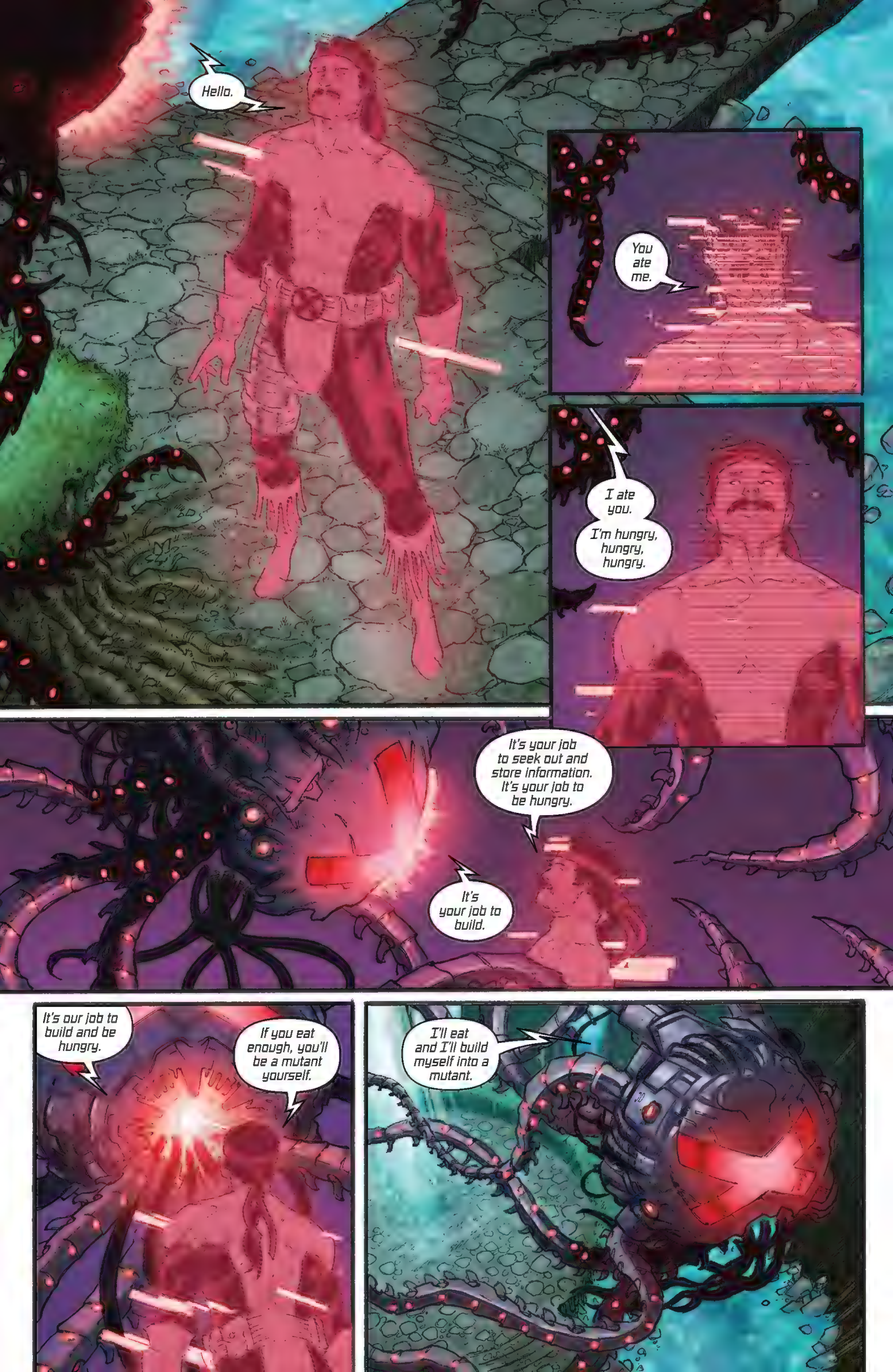
by Robert Gill
& Dean White

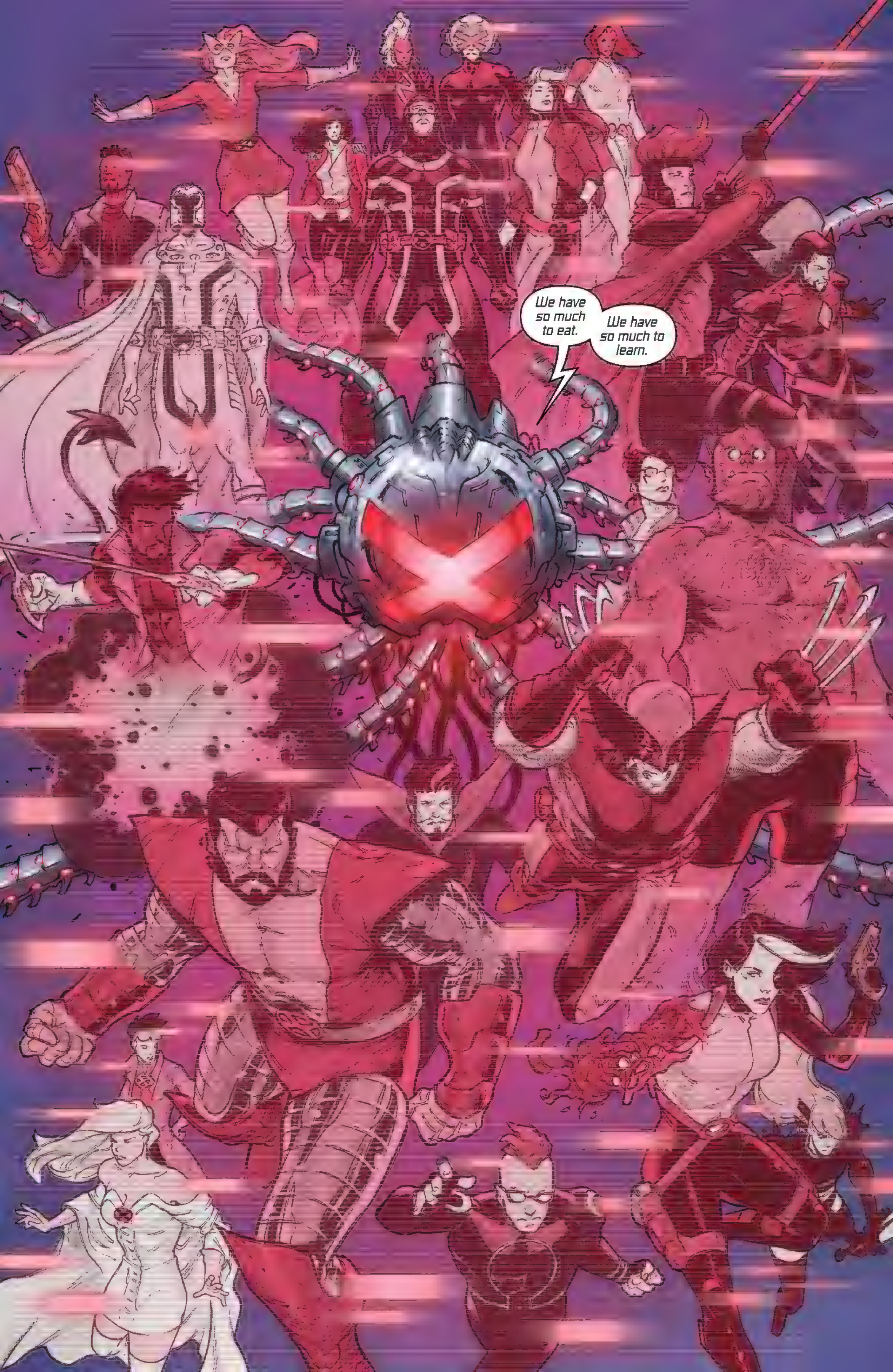
JDC
after
ROB

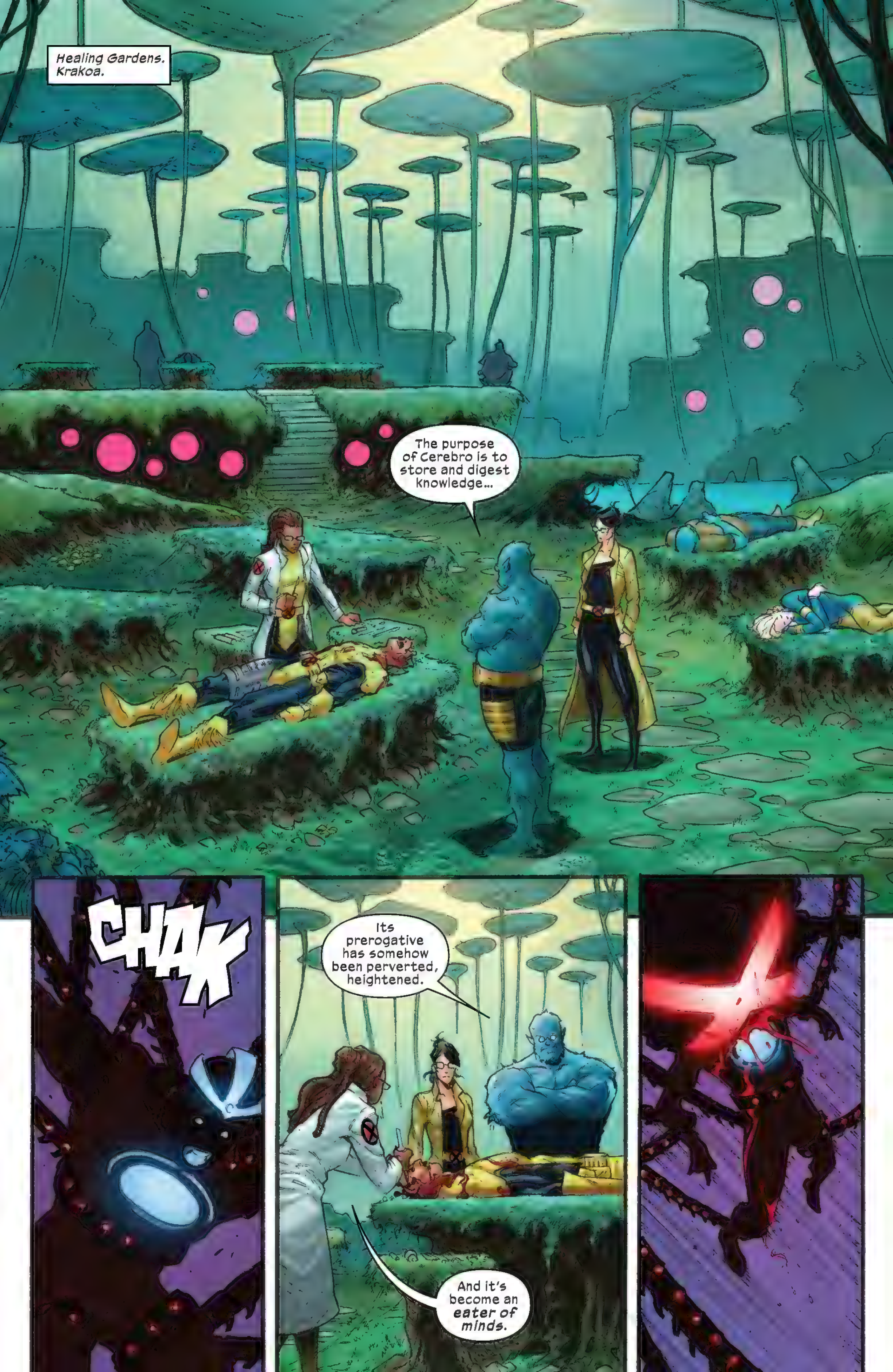
Cerebrax

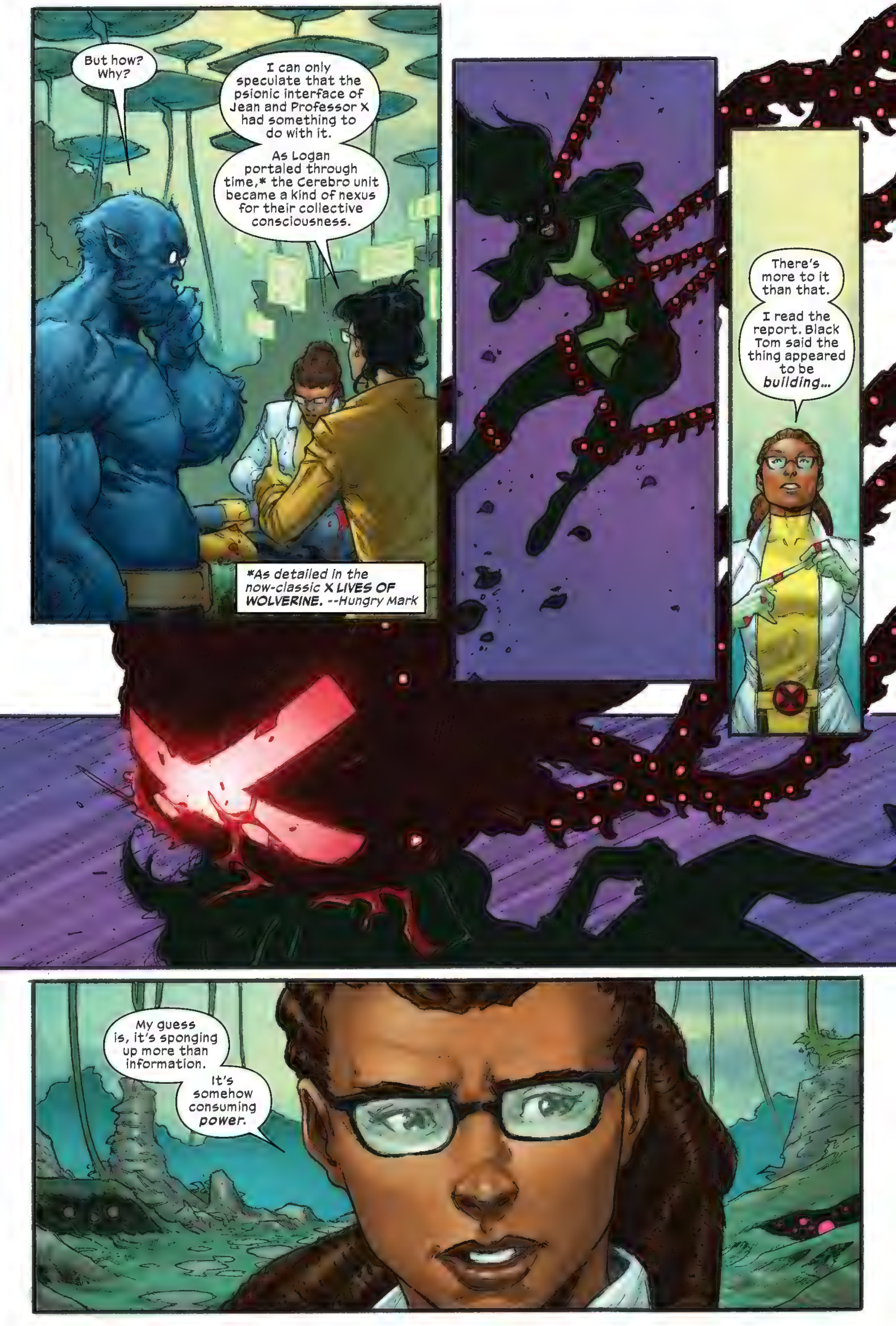
28

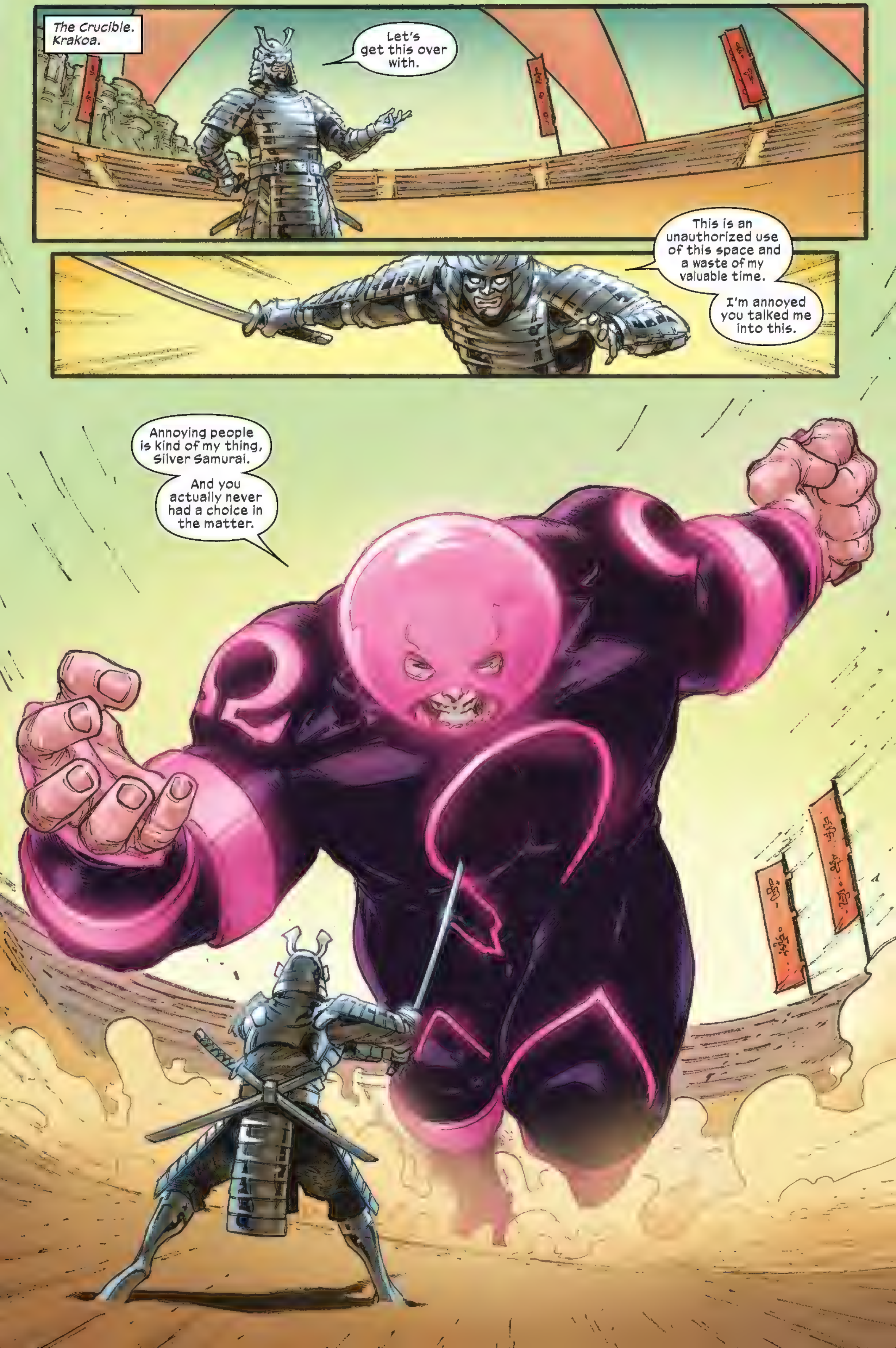

The Cradle.
Krakoa.
Hell...
Hell, hell, hell, hell.
Hellhellhellhello.

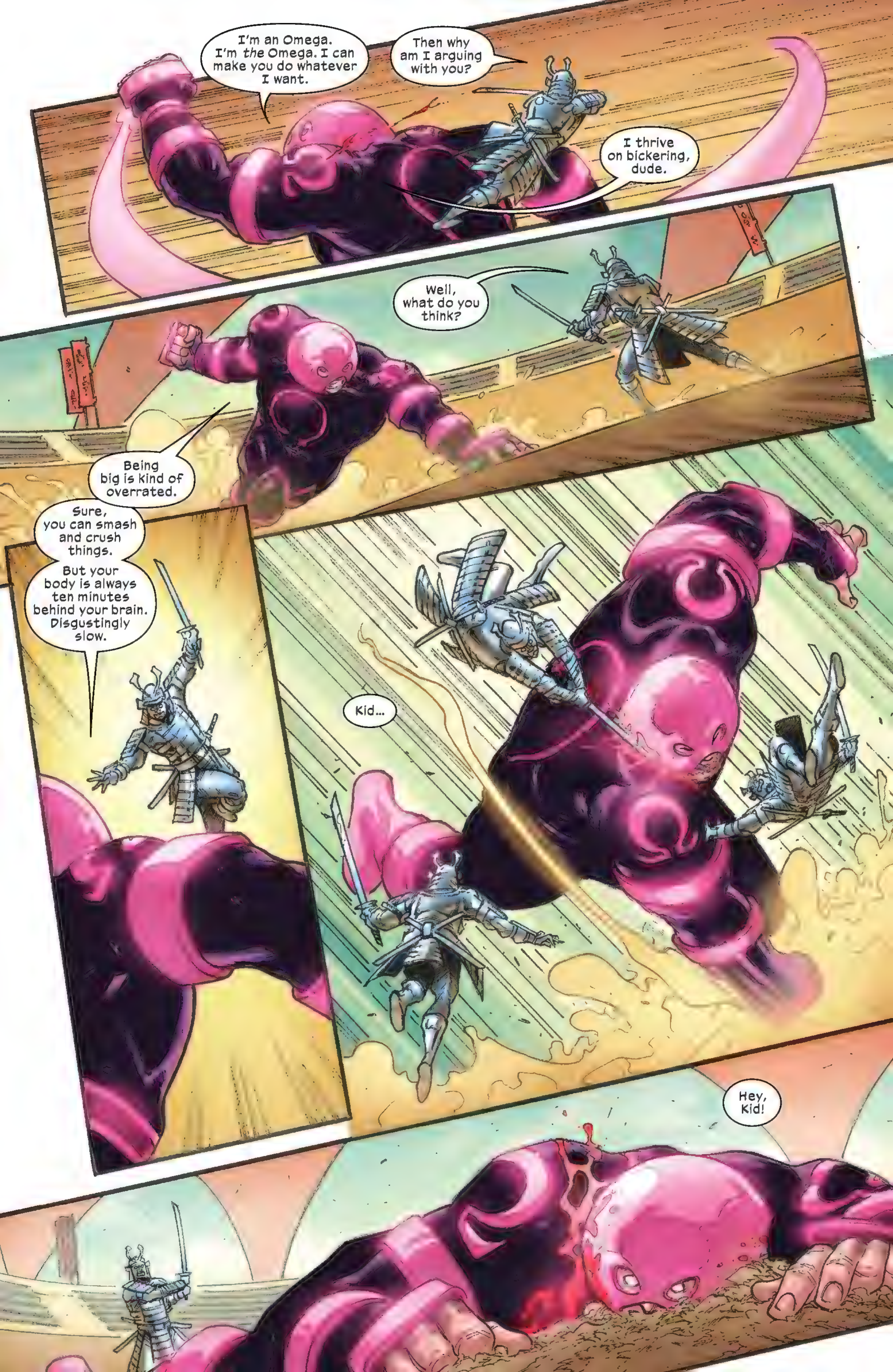

Hello.
You ate me.
I ate you.
I'm hungry, hungry, hungry.
It's your job to seek out and store information. It's your job to be hungry.
It's your job to build.
It's our job to build and be hungry.
If you eat enough, you'll be a mutant yourself.
I'll eat and I'll build myself into a mutant.

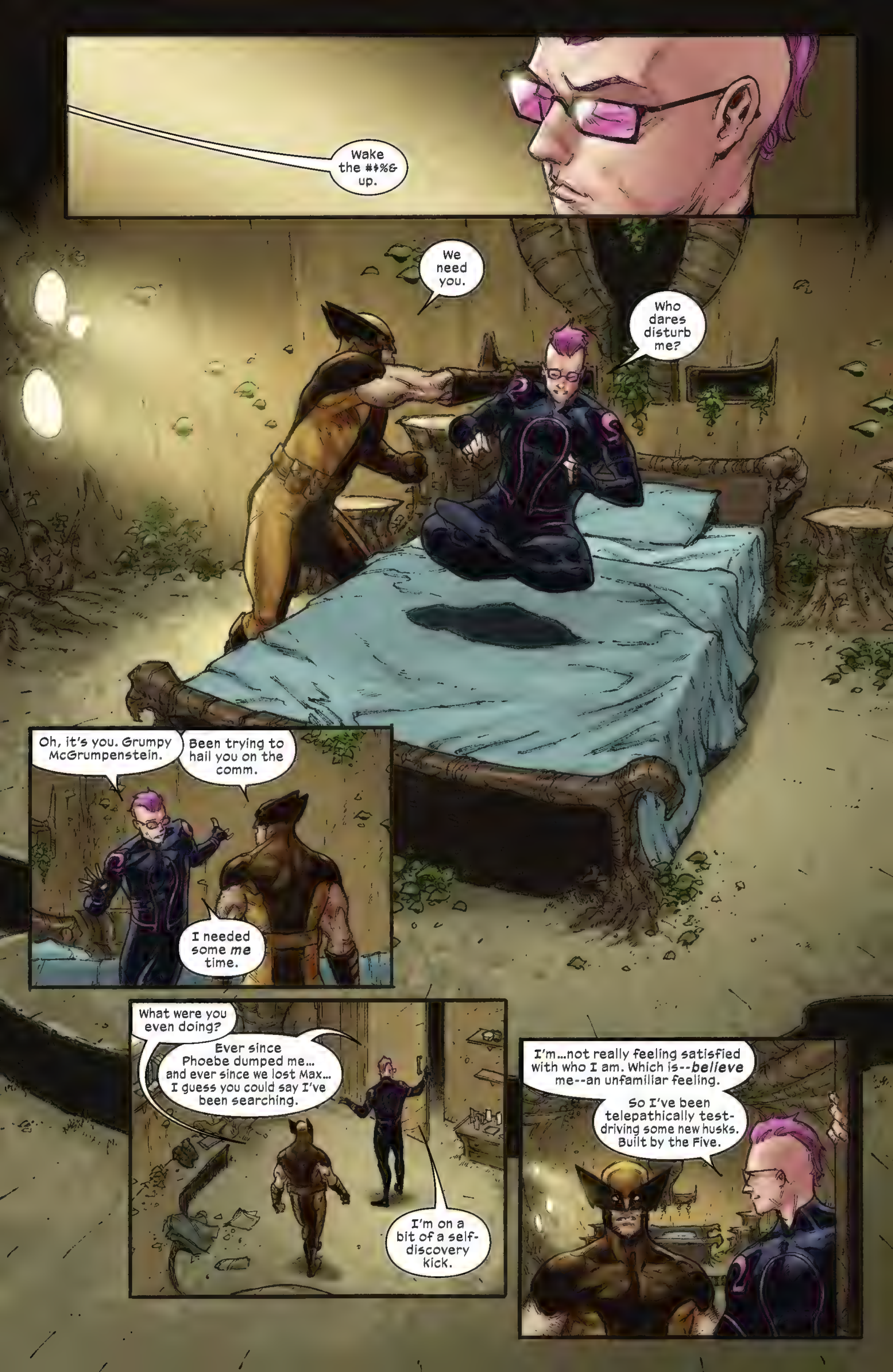

We have so much to eat.
We have so much to learn.

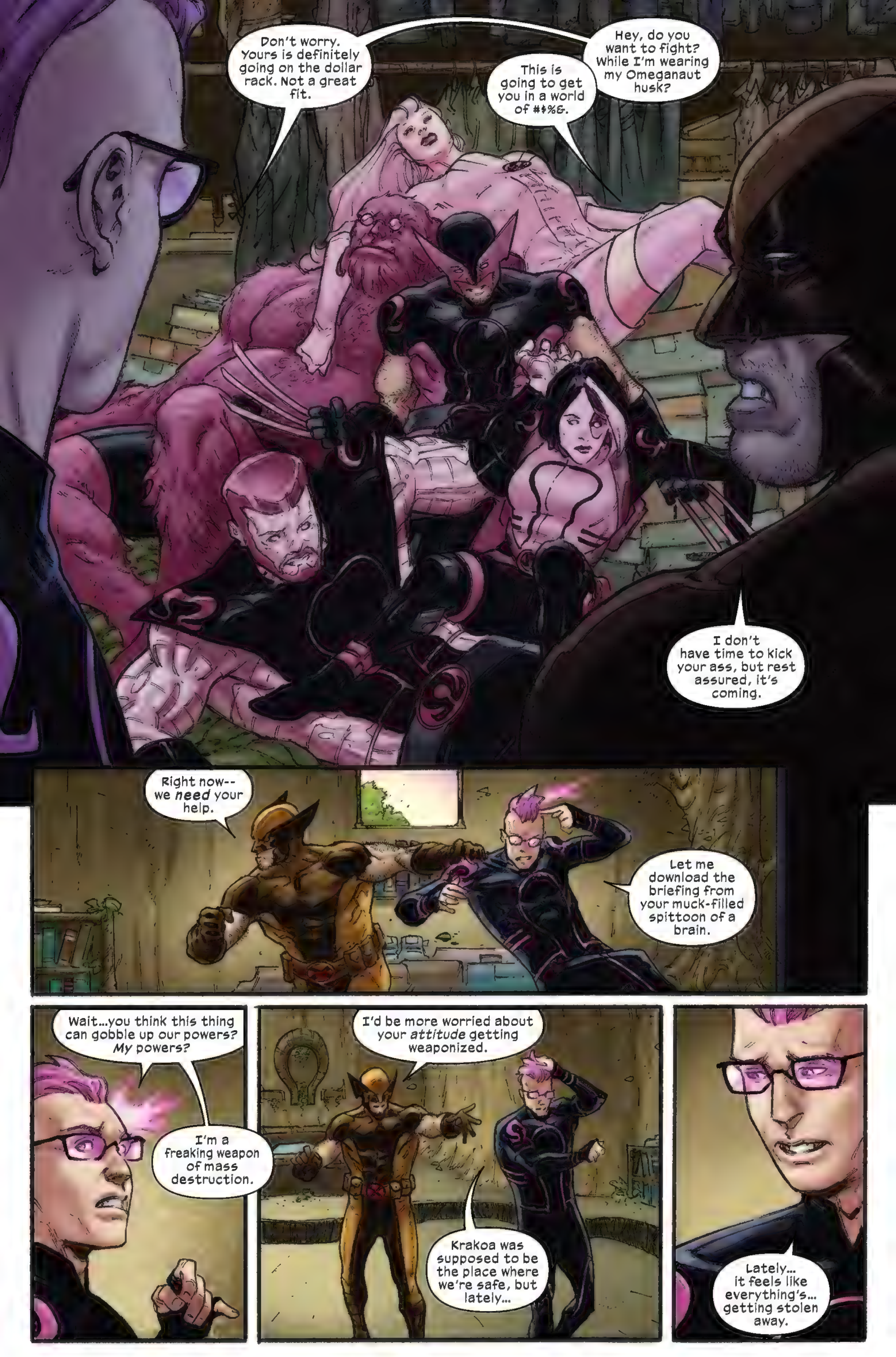

Healing Gardens. Krakoa.
The purpose of Cerebro is to store and digest knowledge...
CHAK
Its prerogative has somehow been perverted, heightened.
And it's become an *eater of minds.*


But how? Why?
I can only speculate that the psionic interface of Jean and Professor X had something to do with it.
As Logan portaled through time,* the Cerebro unit became a kind of nexus for their collective consciousness.
*As detailed in the now-classic **X LIVES OF WOLVERINE.** --Hungry Mark
There's more to it than that.
I read the report. Black Tom said the thing appeared to be *building*...
My guess is, it's sponging up more than information.
It's somehow consuming *power*.


The Crucible. Krakoa.
Let's get this over with.
This is an unauthorized use of this space and a waste of my valuable time.
I'm annoyed you talked me into this.
Annoying people is kind of my thing, Silver Samurai.
And you actually never had a choice in the matter.


I'm an Omega. I'm *the* Omega. I can make you do whatever I want.
Then why am I arguing with you?
I thrive on bickering, dude.
Well, what do you think?
Being big is kind of overrated.
Sure, you can smash and crush things.
But your body is always ten minutes behind your brain. Disgustingly slow.
Kid...
Hey, Kid!


Wake the #$%& up.
We need you.
Who dares disturb me?
Oh, it's you. Grumpy McGrumpenstein.
Been trying to hail you on the comm.
I needed some *me* time.
What were you even doing?
Ever since Phoebe dumped me... and ever since we lost Max... I guess you could say I've been searching.
I'm on a bit of a self-discovery kick.
I'm...not really feeling satisfied with who I am. Which is--***believe*** me--an unfamiliar feeling.
So I've been telepathically test-driving some new husks. Built by the Five.


Don't worry. Yours is definitely going on the dollar rack. Not a great fit.
Hey, do you want to fight? While I'm wearing my Omeganaut husk?
This is going to get you in a world of #$%&.
I don't have time to kick your ass, but rest assured, it's coming.
Right now-- we *need* your help.
Let me download the briefing from your muck-filled spittoon of a brain.
Wait...you think this thing can gobble up our powers? *My* powers?
I'm a freaking weapon of mass destruction.
I'd be more worried about your *attitude* getting weaponized.
Krakoa was supposed to be the place where we're safe, but lately...
Lately... it feels like everything's... getting stolen away.

MEMO

To: X-Force

Attn: Beast, Sage

From: The Five

Re: Kid Omega's Abuse of Power

Yes, we are aware of your senior ranking. Yes, we know Xavier has given you "carte blanche" as an institution. We understand that you get front-of-the-line resurrection priority. And if you instruct us to "cook," it has been noted that we should "cook" without question.

But.

Are you privy to what Kid Omega is asking us to do right now?

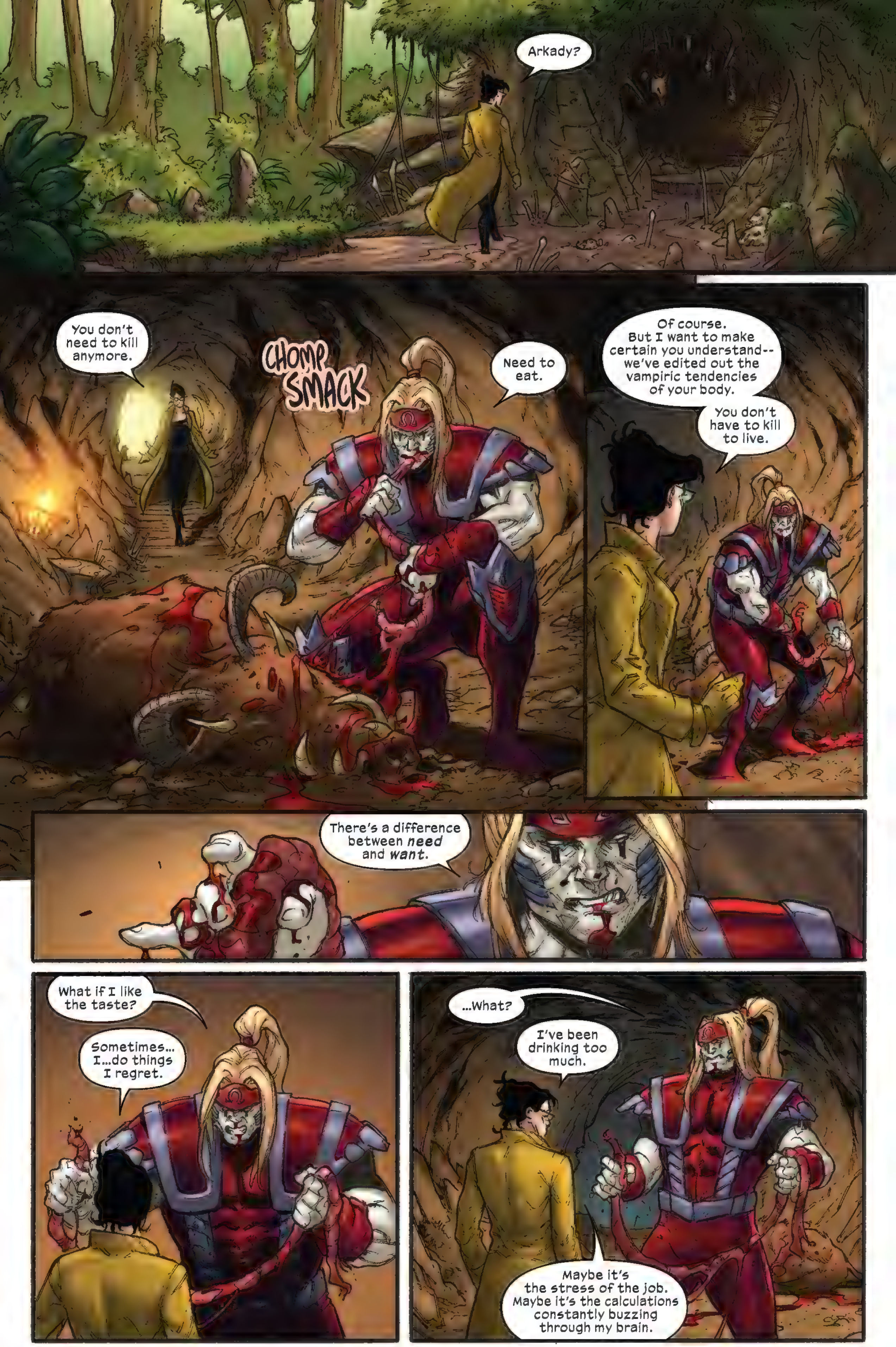
He is supplying us with specs on what he calls "husks." These are bodies. Vacant bodies that he then remote-pilots via some combination of telepathy and telekinesis.

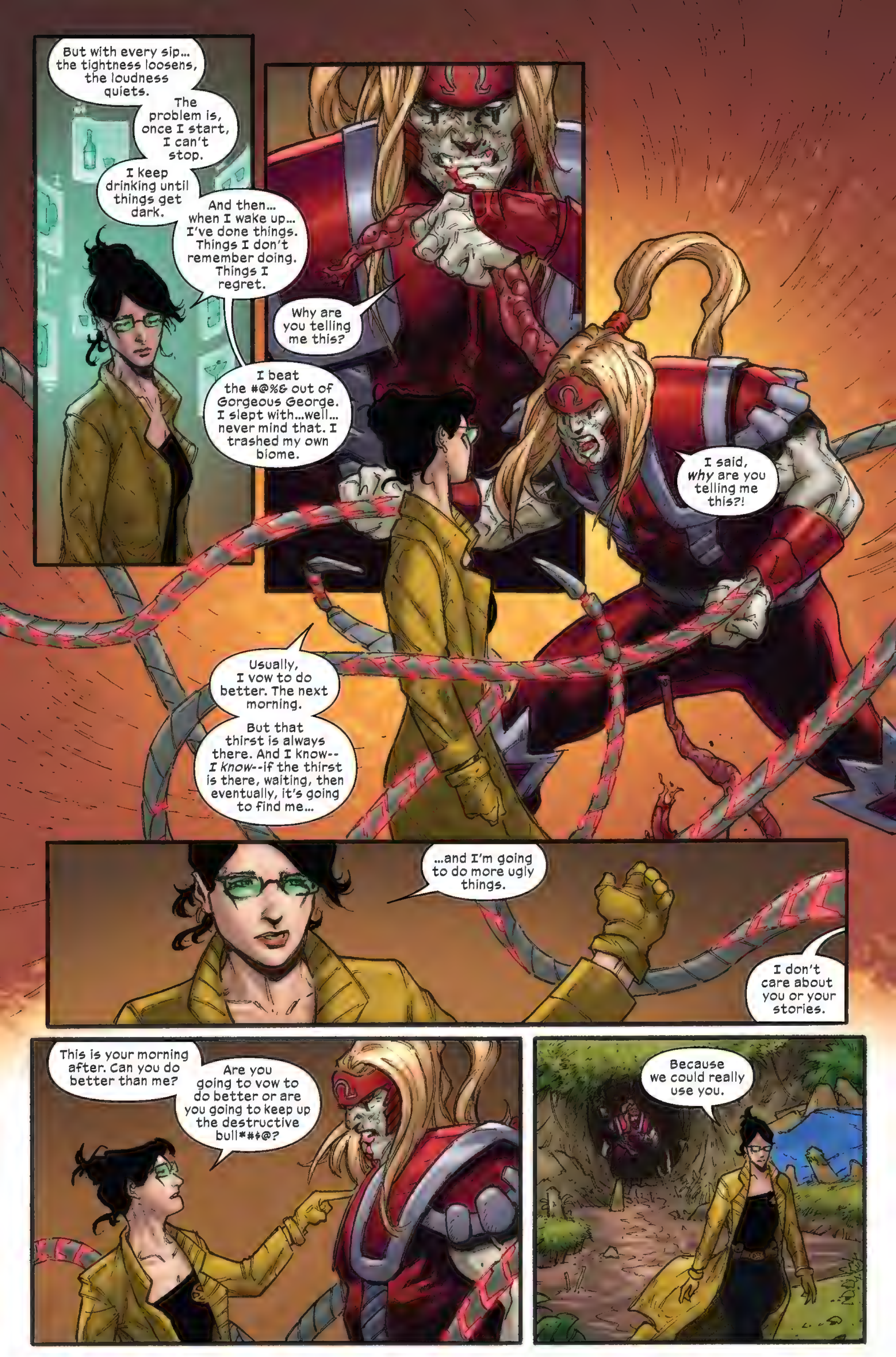
His latest "husk" is what he calls the Omeganaut, inspired by Cain Marko. It is Quentin Quire's DNA -- explored through an oversized, muscled-up build.

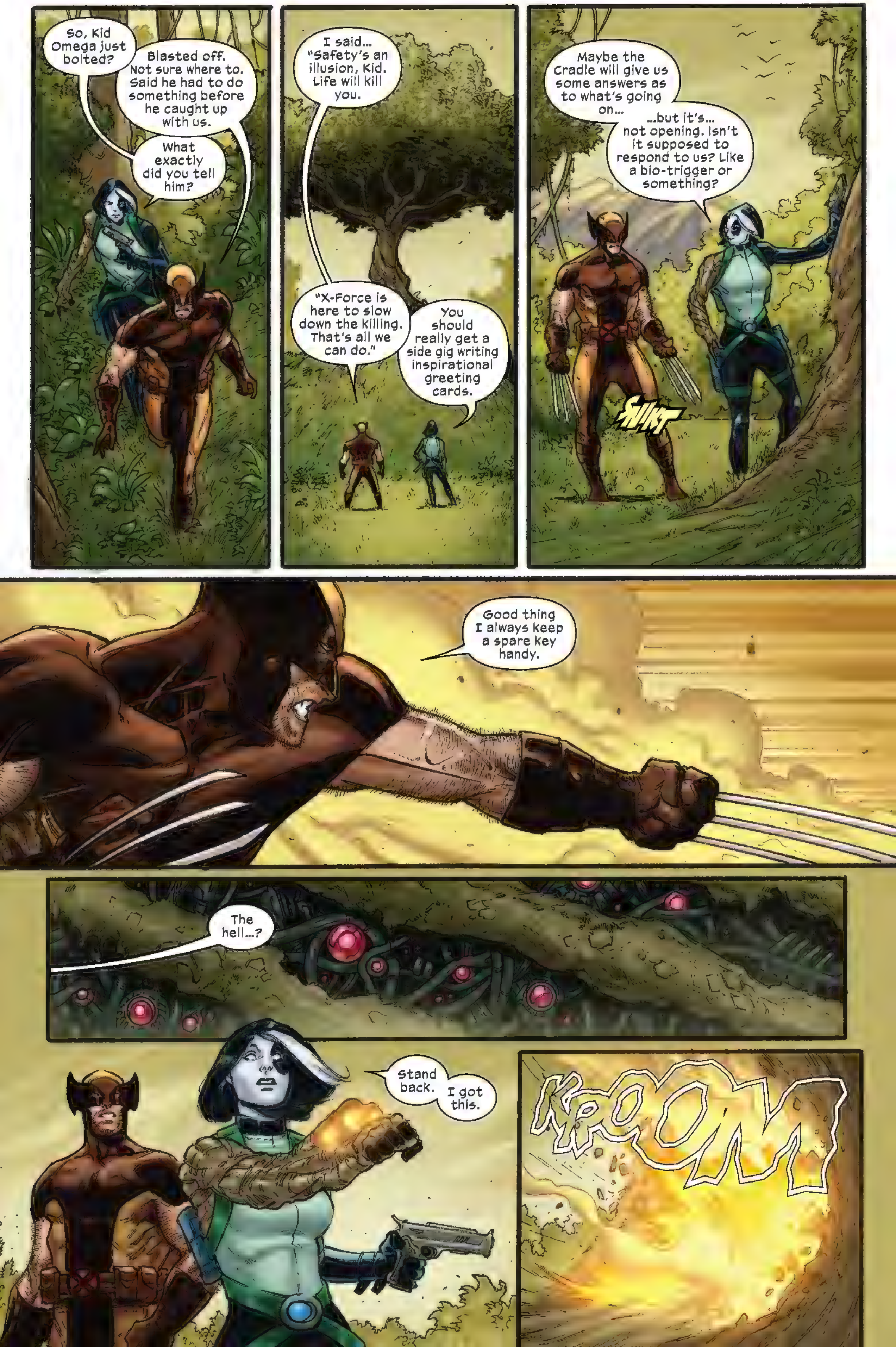
To be perfectly frank, we're not sure if we're your war chest or toy chest.

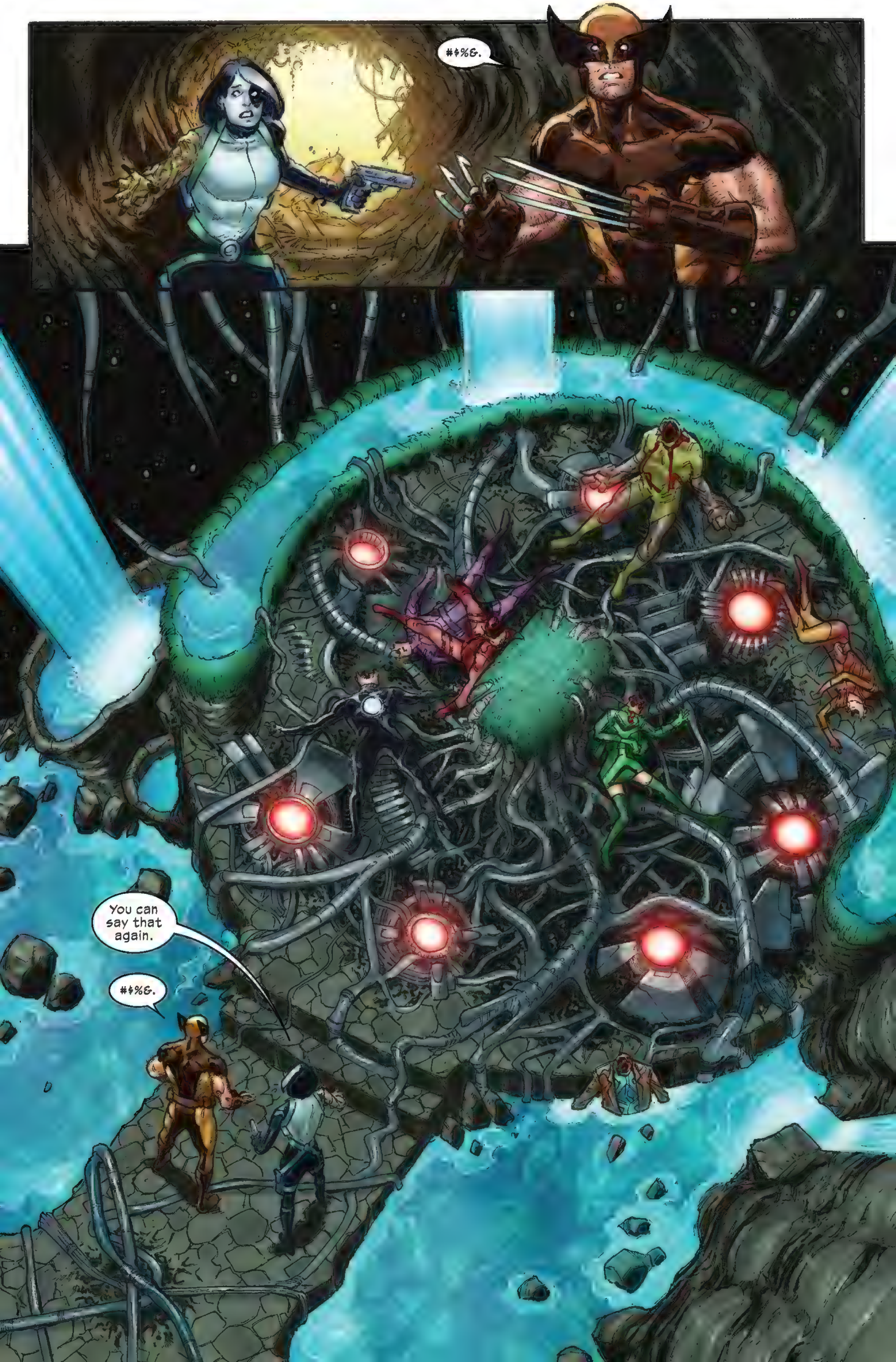
Please advise.

[redacted]


Arkady?
You don't need to kill anymore.
CHOMP SMACK
Need to eat.
Of course. But I want to make certain you understand--we've edited out the vampiric tendencies of your body.
You don't have to kill to live.
There's a difference between *need* and *want*.
What if I like the taste?
Sometimes... I...do things I regret.
...What?
I've been drinking too much.
Maybe it's the stress of the job. Maybe it's the calculations constantly buzzing through my brain.


But with every sip... the tightness loosens, the loudness quiets.
The problem is, once I start, I can't stop.
I keep drinking until things get dark.
And then... when I wake up... I've done things. Things I don't remember doing. Things I regret.
Why are you telling me this?
I beat the #@%& out of Gorgeous George. I slept with...well... never mind that. I trashed my own biome.
I said, *why* are you telling me this?!
Usually, I vow to do better. The next morning.
But that thirst is always there. And I know-- *I know*--if the thirst is there, waiting, then eventually, it's going to find me...
...and I'm going to do more ugly things.
I don't care about you or your stories.
This is your morning after. Can you do better than me?
Are you going to vow to do better or are you going to keep up the destructive bull*#$@?
Because we could really use you.


So, Kid Omega just bolted?
Blasted off. Not sure where to. Said he had to do something before he caught up with us.
What exactly did you tell him?
I said... "Safety's an illusion, Kid. Life will kill you.
"X-Force is here to slow down the killing. That's all we can do."
You should really get a side gig writing inspirational greeting cards.
Maybe the Cradle will give us some answers as to what's going on...
...but it's... not opening. Isn't it supposed to respond to us? Like a bio-trigger or something?
SNIKT
Good thing I always keep a spare key handy.
The hell...?
Stand back.
I got this.
KROOM


#$%&.
You can say that again.
#$%&.

They say to never trust a man with a beard, for he is hiding something. But no one would ever suspect Piotr Rasputin, the Colossus, of anything untoward. His country -- and even his brother -- may be the enemy of Krakoa, but he is its staunch ally. He has faced psychic interrogation after all. And he has been especially selected by the Quiet Council for his calm trustworthiness.

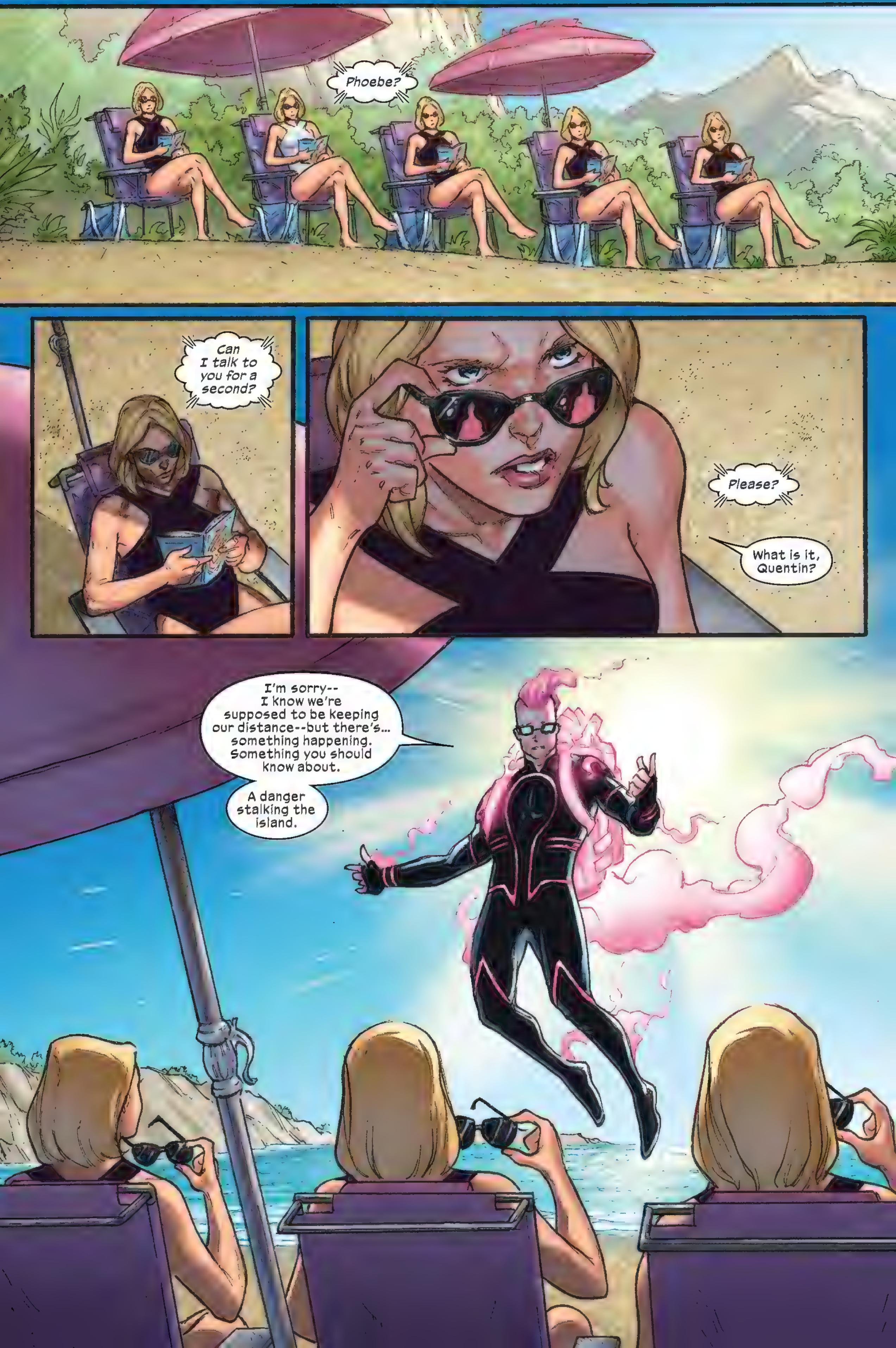
He helps a child who has fallen and scraped his knee. He pets a dog, finding the spot beneath its ears it likes best. His hands are so big -- as big as a catcher's mitt, as big as a bear paw -- but so gentle in their touch. He could tear a tree in half, but so can he pluck a ripe peach without bruising it. He can tear the arms off a body, but so can he grip a paintbrush in the most delicate manner, feathering clouds across landscapes.

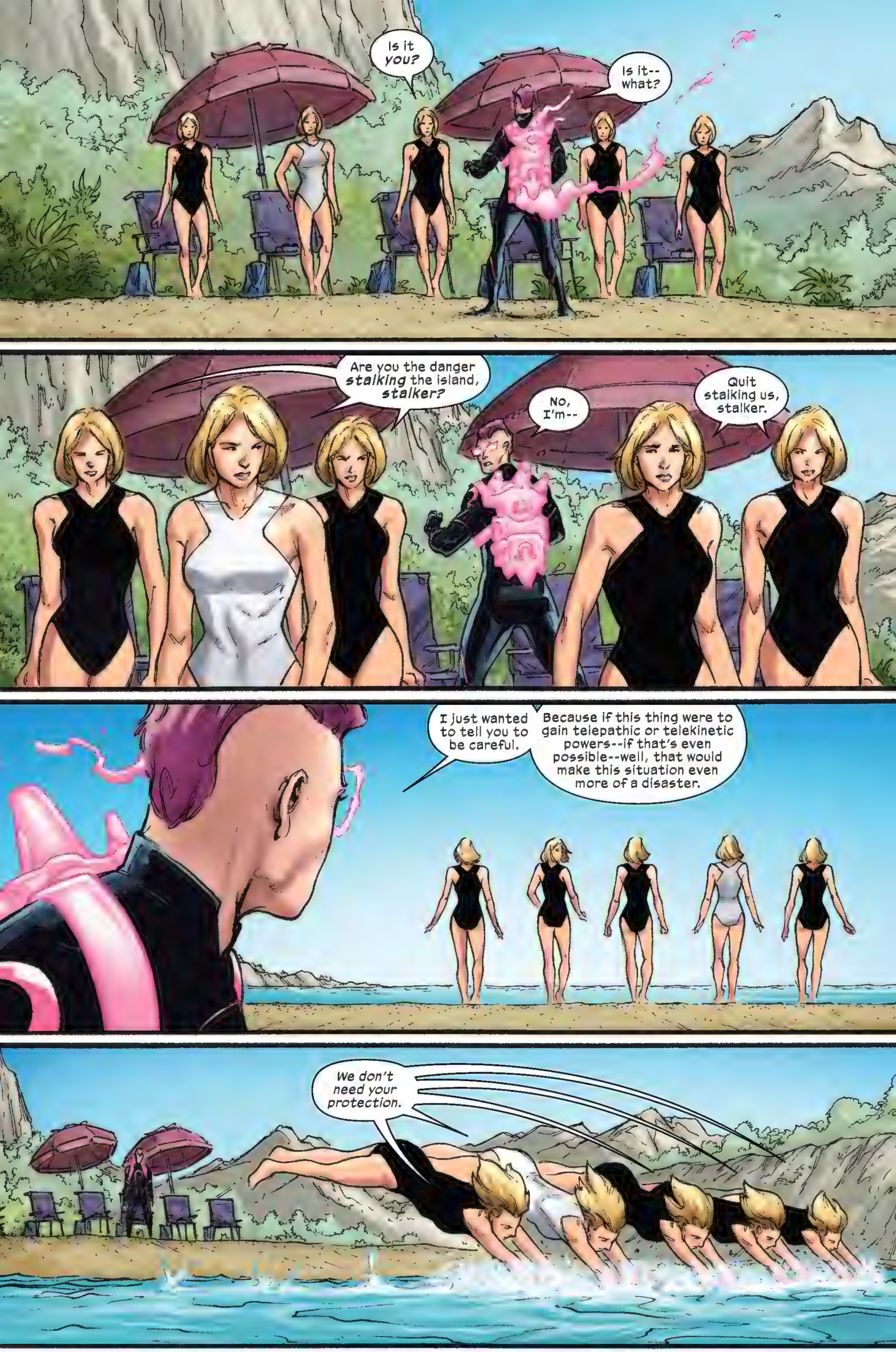
Mornings, he likes to sit on the beach, watching the waves. They roar in and hiss out in a constant battle for the shore. His hand -- his big, terrible, gentle hand -- absently plays with the sand. Picking up palmfuls and letting the grains sift through his fingers. Rubbing a thumb along a seashell. And then, with a single outstretched finger, tracing a design.

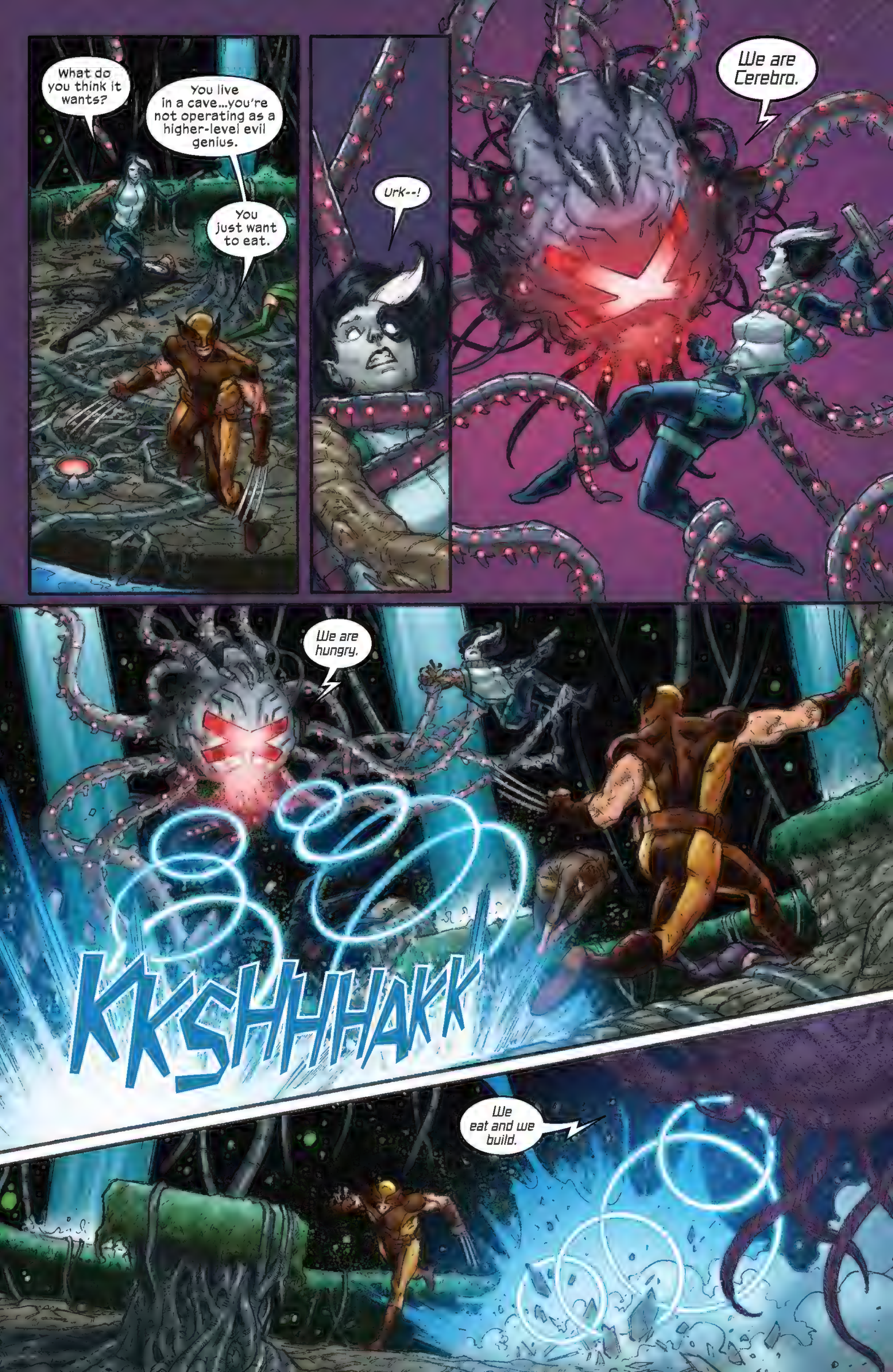
The design remains when he stands up and brushes the sand off his rear and hikes off into the jungle.

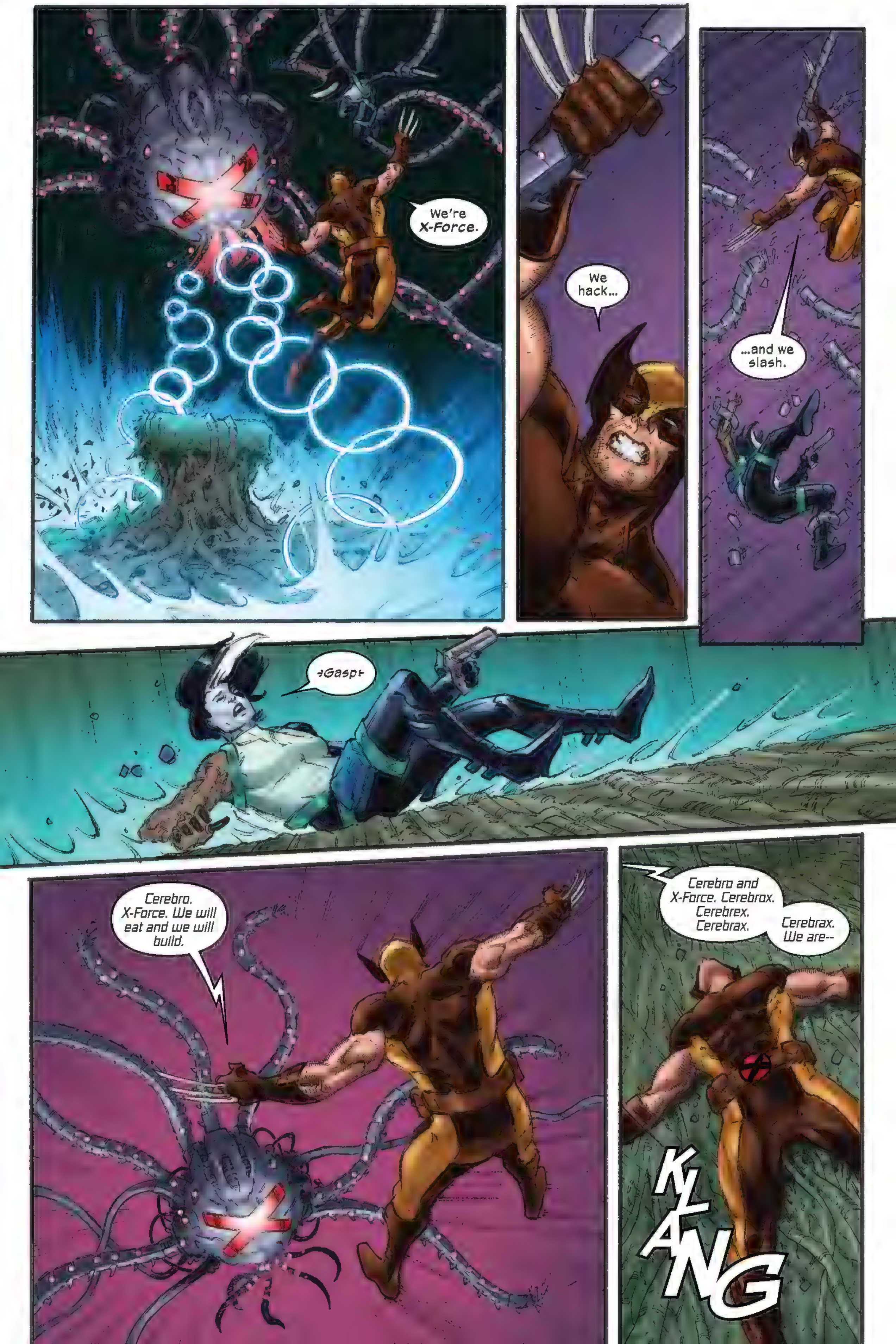
HELP ME, it reads.

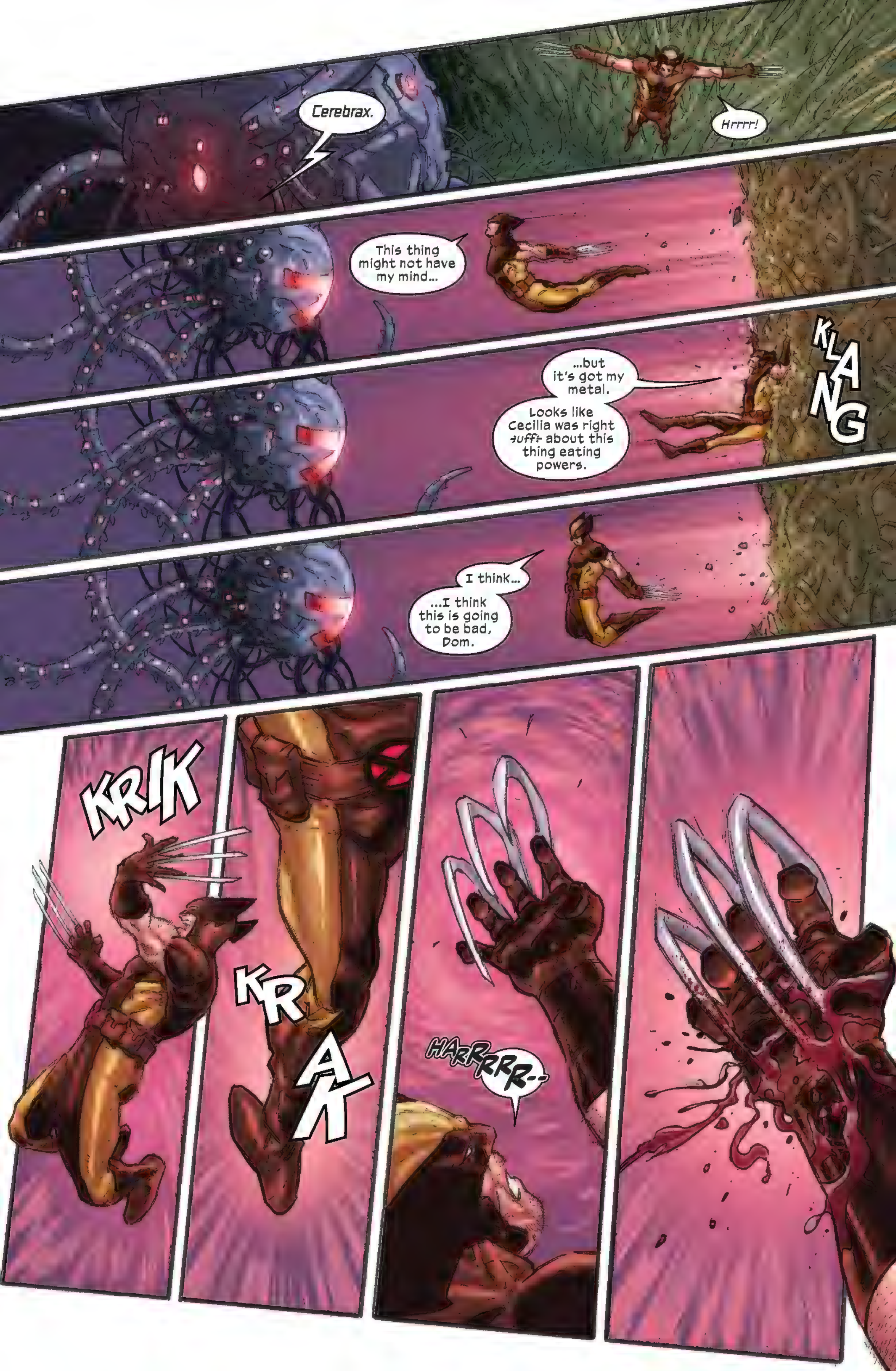
летописец

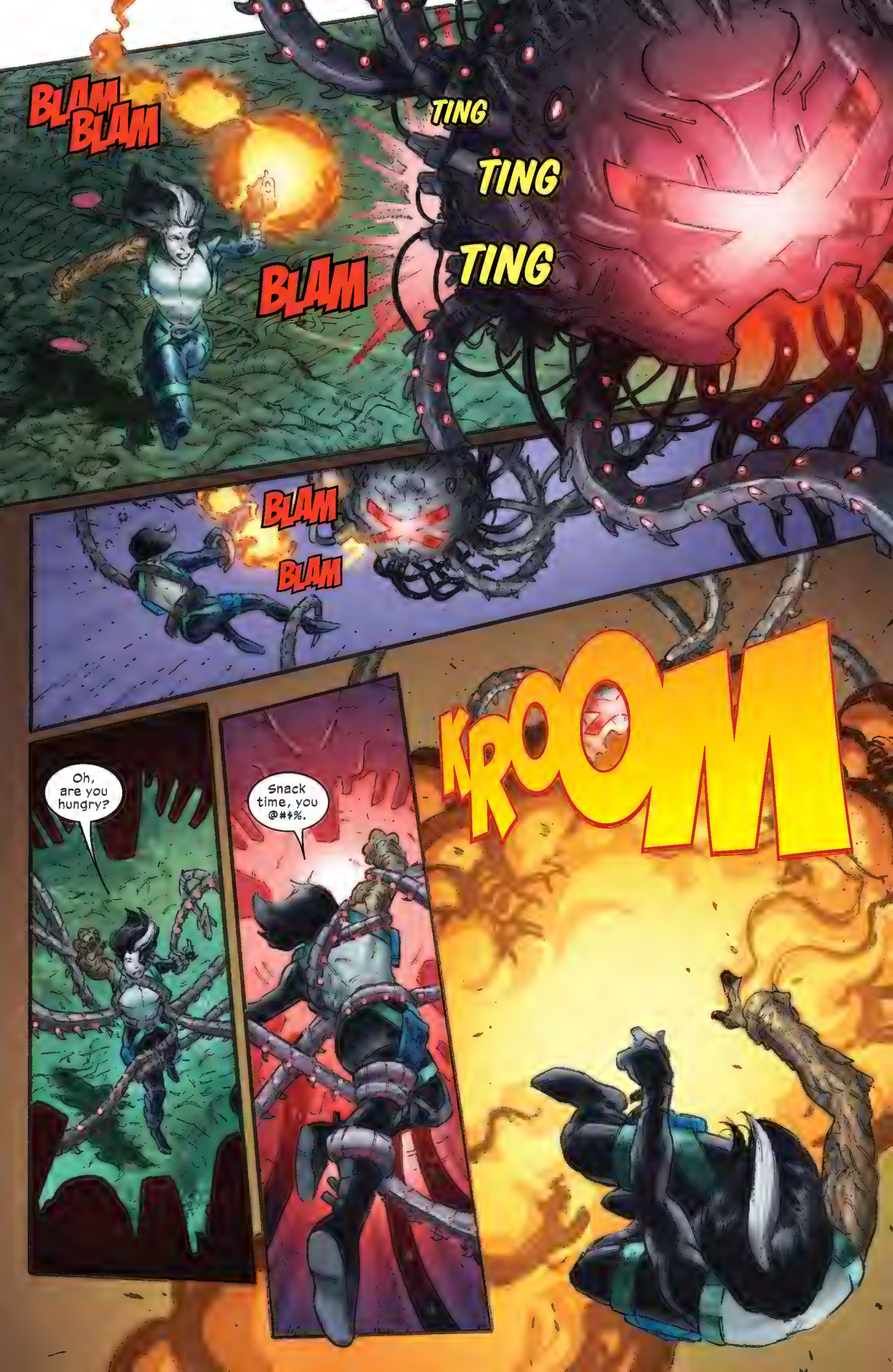

Phoebe?
Can I talk to you for a second?
Please?
What is it, Quentin?
I'm sorry-- I know we're supposed to be keeping our distance--but there's... something happening. Something you should know about.
A danger stalking the island.

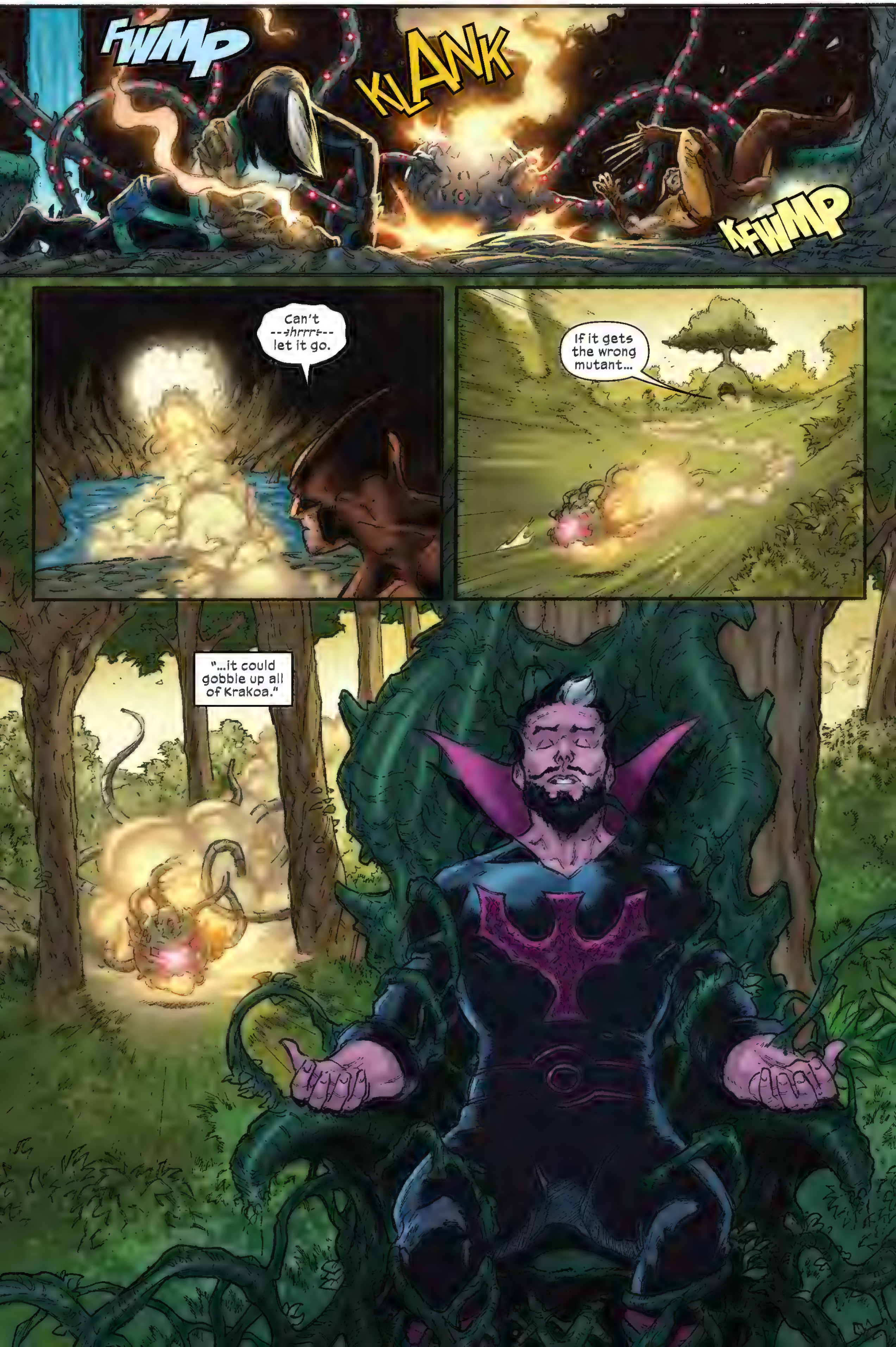

Is it *you?*
Is it-- what?
Are you the danger *stalking* the island, *stalker?*
No, I'm--
Quit stalking us, stalker.
I just wanted to tell you to be careful.
Because if this thing were to gain telepathic or telekinetic powers--if that's even possible--well, that would make this situation even more of a disaster.
We don't need your protection.


What do you think it wants?
You live in a cave...you're not operating as a higher-level evil genius.
You just want to eat.
Urk--!
We are Cerebro.
We are hungry.
KKSHHHAKK
We eat and we build.


We're *X-Force.*
We hack...
...and we slash.
=Gasp=
Cerebro. X-Force. We will eat and we will build.
Cerebro and X-Force. Cerebrox. Cerebrex. Cerebrax.
Cerebrax. We are--
KLANG


Cerebrax.
Hrrrr!
This thing might not have my mind...
KLANG
...but it's got my metal.
Looks like Cecilia was right -uff- about this thing eating powers.
I think...
...I think this is going to be bad, Dom.
KRIK
KRAK
HARRRRR--


BLAM BLAM
TING
TING
TING
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
Oh, are you hungry?
Snack time, you @#$%.
KROOM

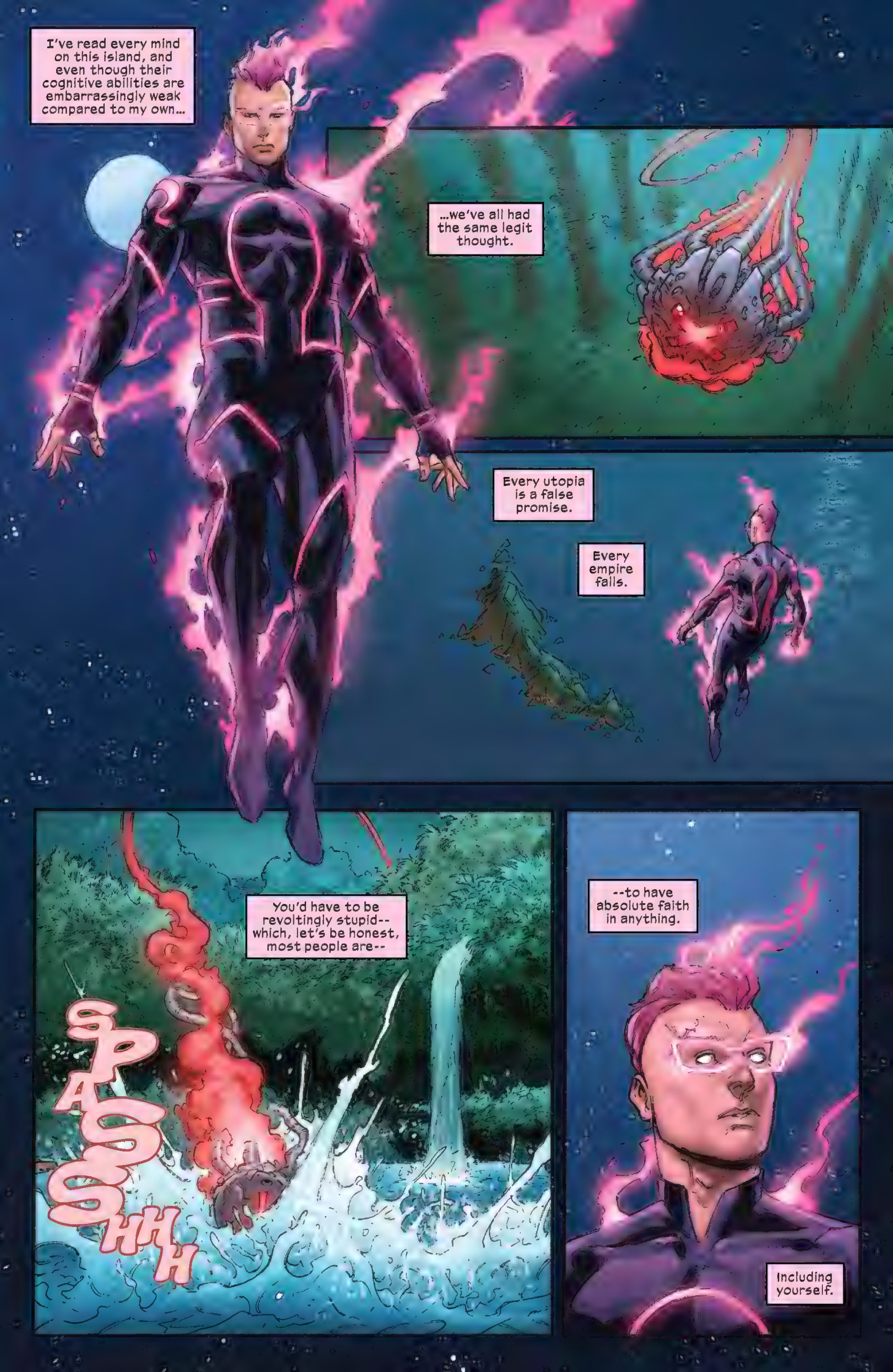

FWMP
KLANK
KFWMP
Can't --*hrrr*-- let it go.
If it gets the wrong mutant...
"...it could gobble up all of Krakoa."

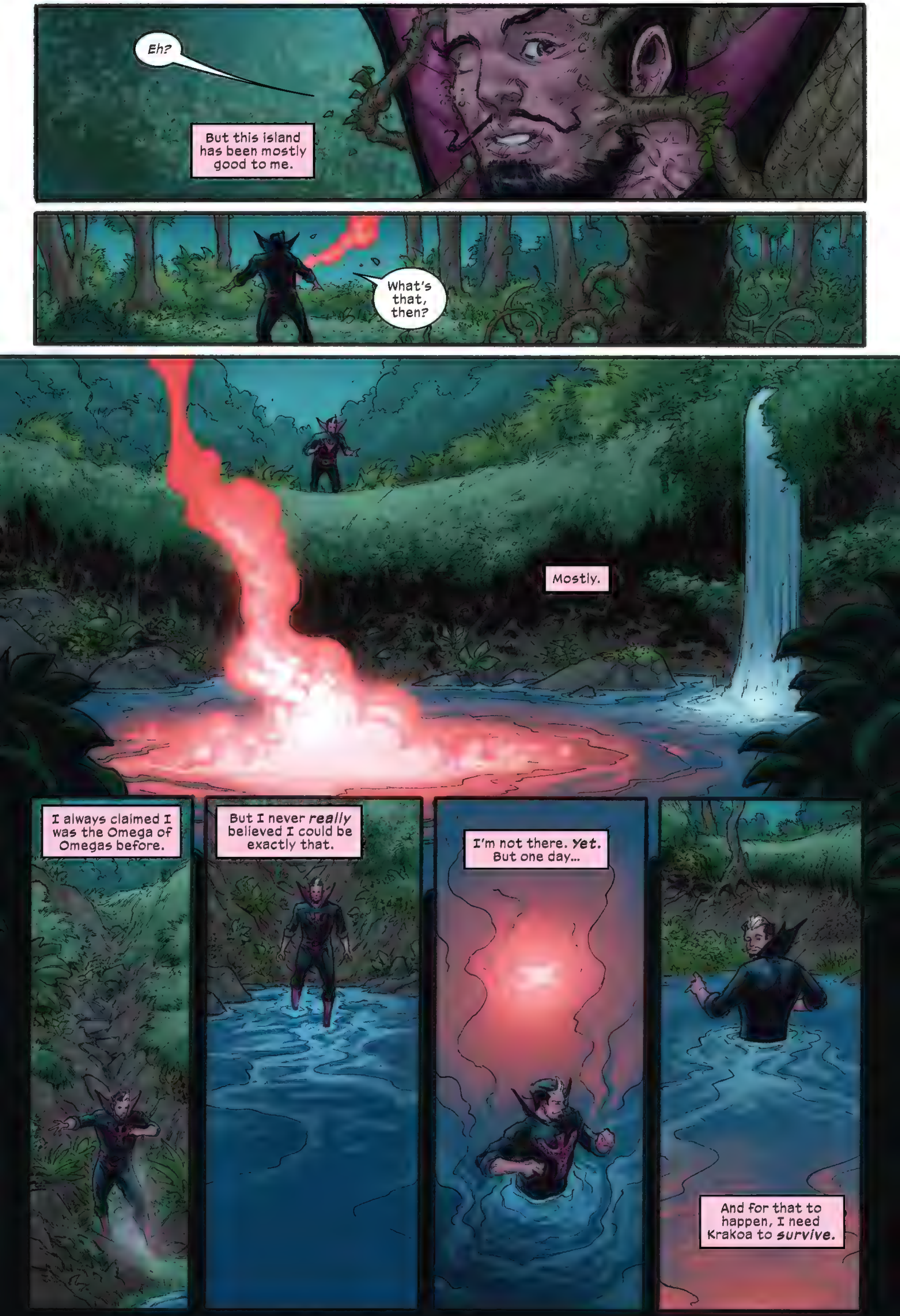
[XF29]

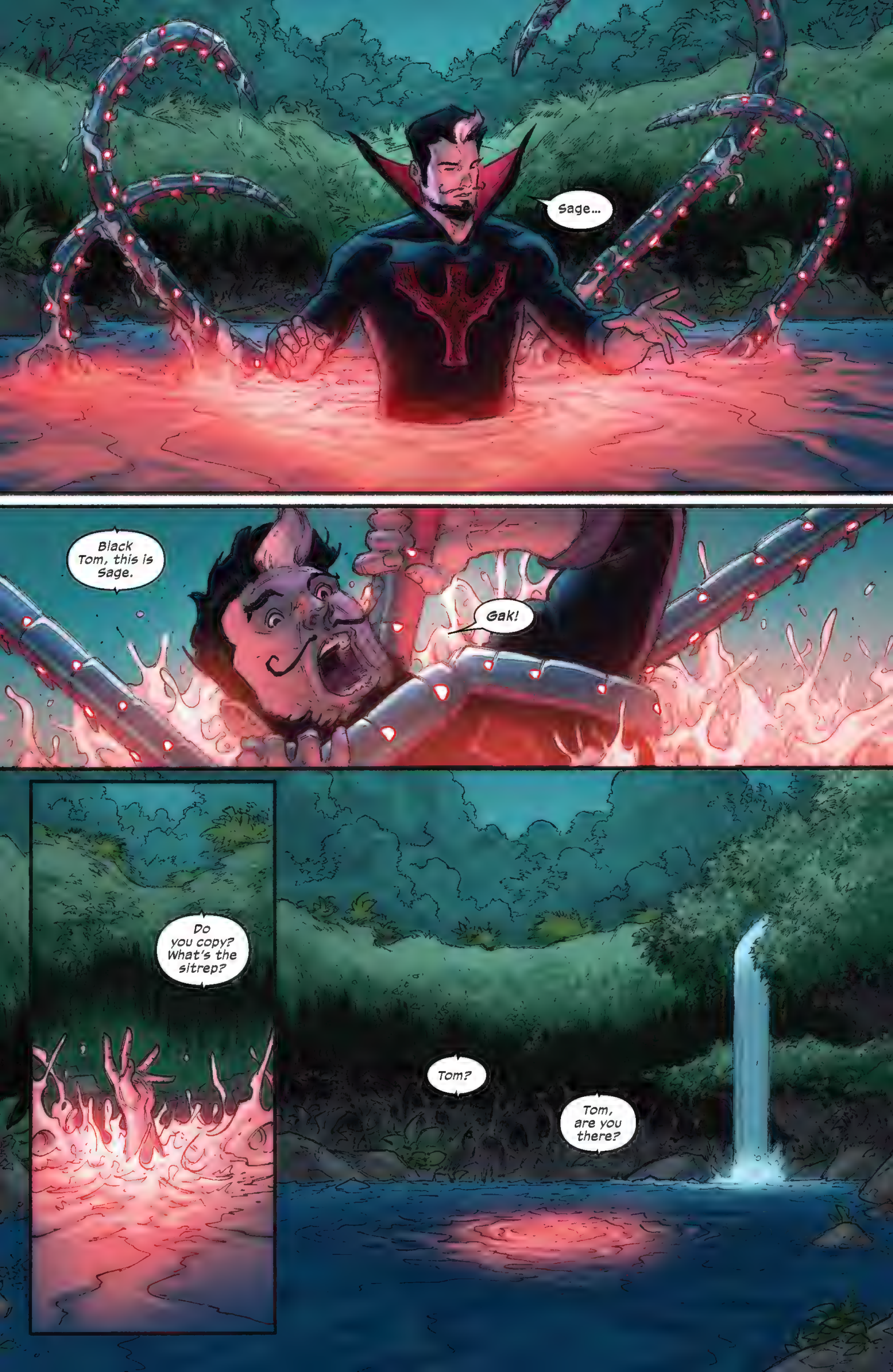
Chapter 29

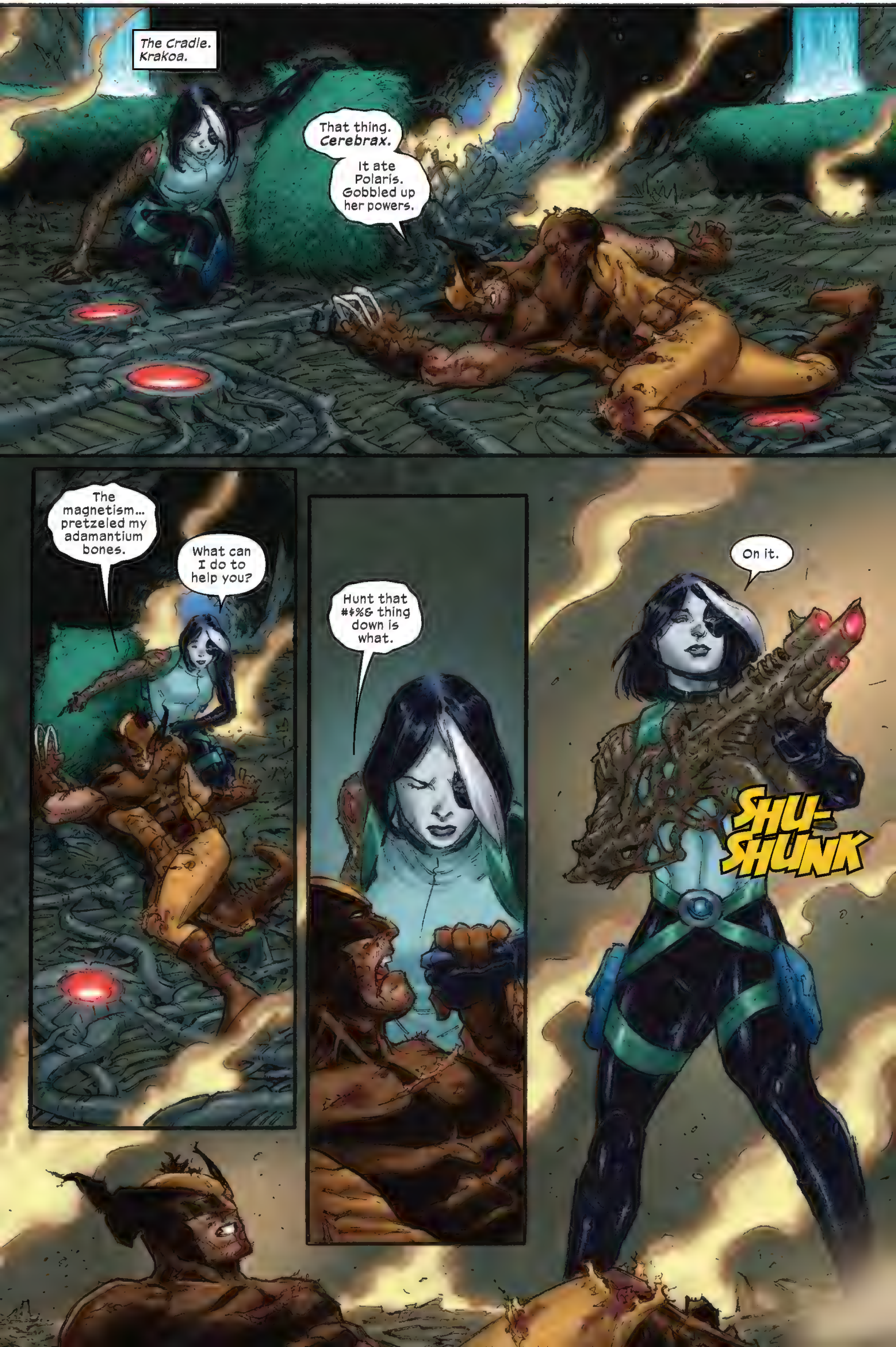
The Hungry Mind

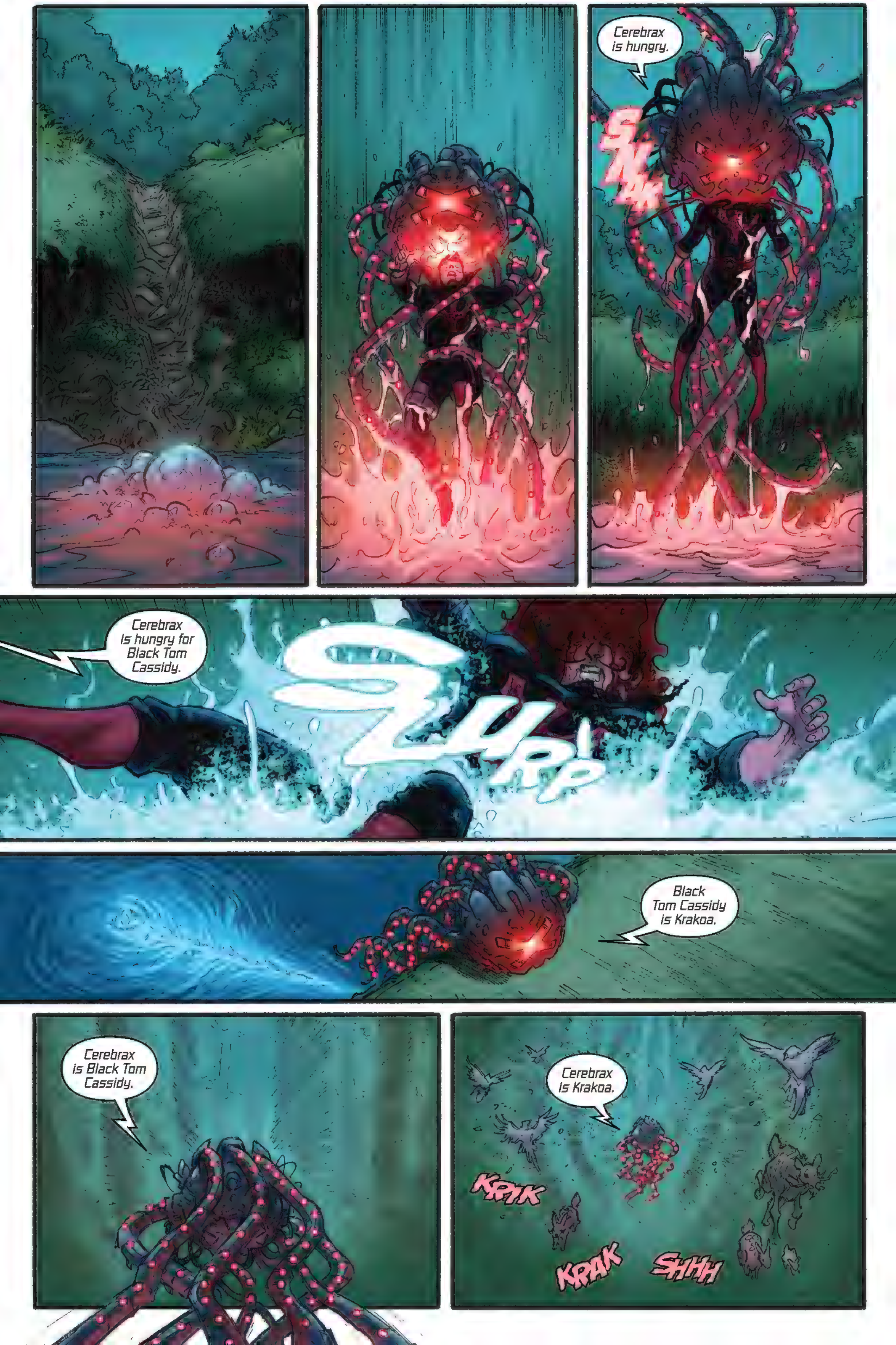
29

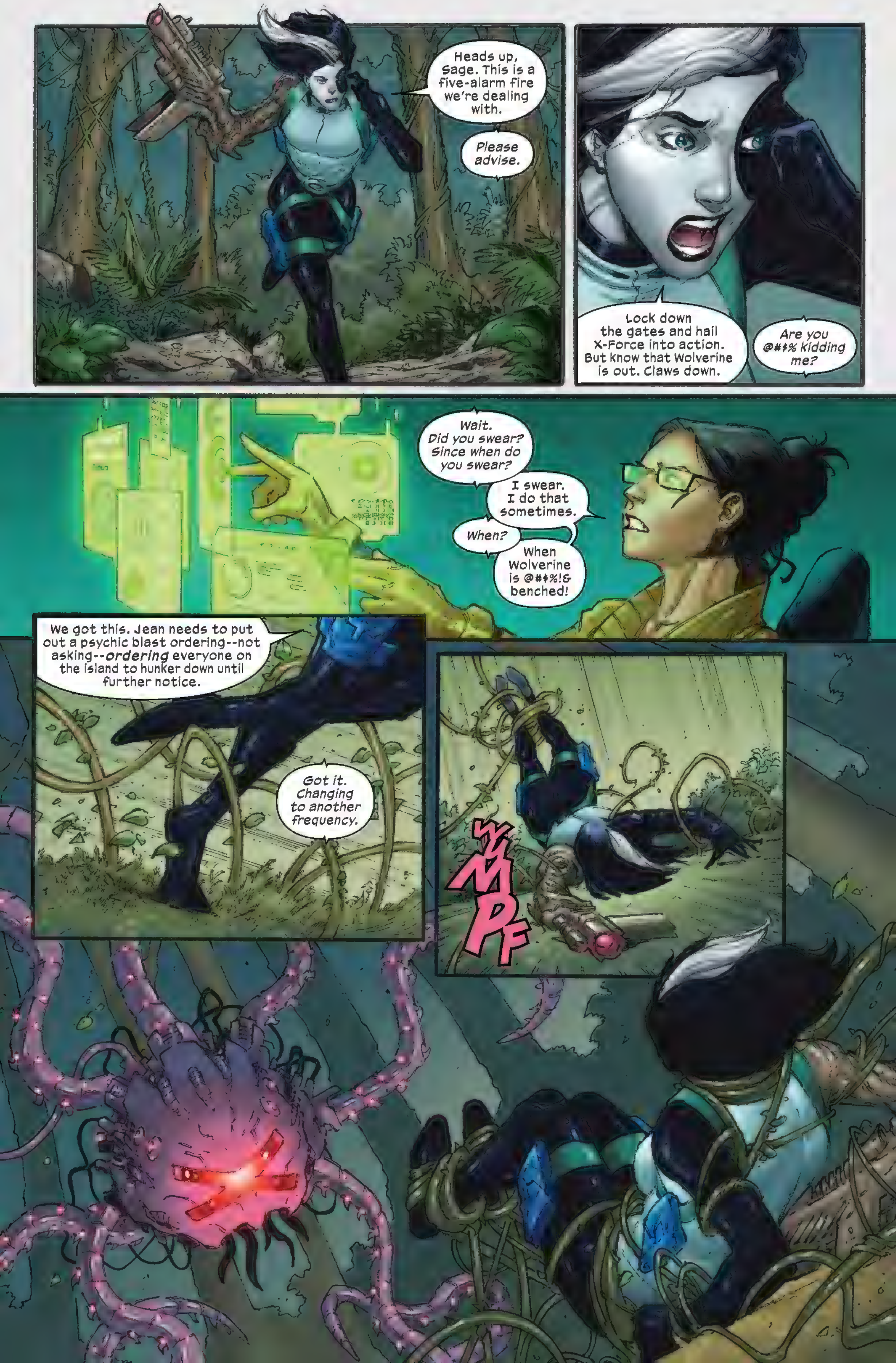

I've read every mind on this island, and even though their cognitive abilities are embarrassingly weak compared to my own...
...we've all had the same legit thought.
Every utopia is a false promise.
Every empire falls.
You'd have to be revoltingly stupid--which, let's be honest, most people are--
SPASSHHH
--to have absolute faith in anything.
Including yourself.

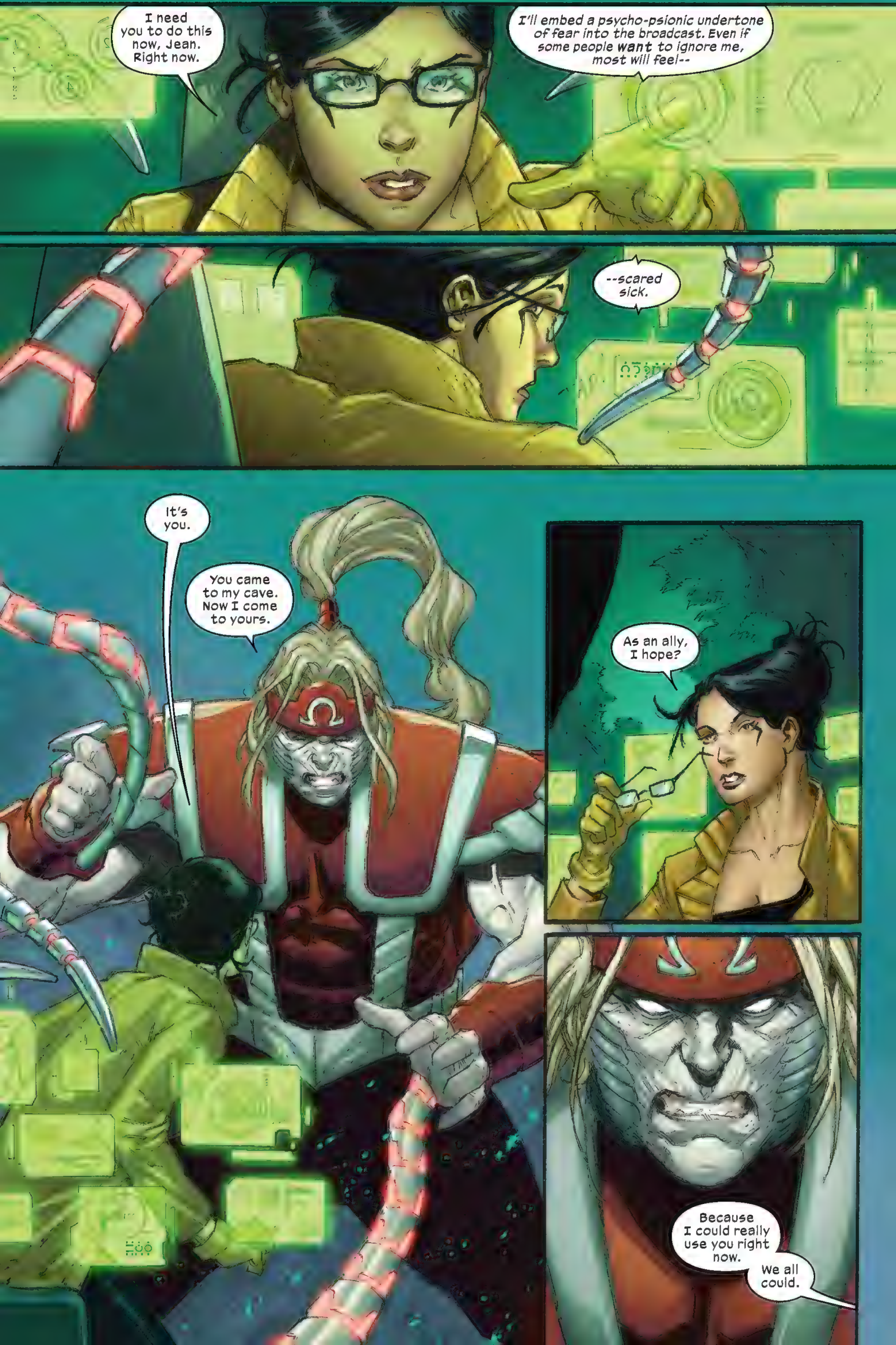

Eh?
But this island has been mostly good to me.
What's that, then?
Mostly.
I always claimed I was the Omega of Omegas before.
But I never *really* believed I could be exactly that.
I'm not there. *Yet.* But one day...
And for that to happen, I need Krakoa to *survive.*


Sage...
Black Tom, this is Sage.
Gak!
Do you copy? What's the sitrep?
Tom?
Tom, are you there?


The Cradle. Krakoa.
That thing. *Cerebrax.*
It ate Polaris. Gobbled up her powers.
The magnetism... pretzeled my adamantium bones.
What can I do to help you?
Hunt that #$%& thing down is what.
On it.
SHU-SHUNK


Cerebrax is hungry.
Cerebrax is hungry for Black Tom Cassidy.
SLURP
Black Tom Cassidy is Krakoa.
Cerebrax is Black Tom Cassidy.
Cerebrax is Krakoa.
KRIK
KRAK
SHHH


Heads up, Sage. This is a five-alarm fire we're dealing with.
Please advise.
Lock down the gates and hail X-Force into action. But know that Wolverine is out. Claws down.
Are you @#$% kidding me?
Wait. Did you swear? Since when do you swear?
I swear. I do that sometimes.
When?
When Wolverine is @#$%!& benched!
We got this. Jean needs to put out a psychic blast ordering--not asking--*ordering* everyone on the island to hunker down until further notice.
Got it. Changing to another frequency.
WUMPF


I need you to do this now, Jean. Right now.
I'll embed a psycho-psionic undertone of fear into the broadcast. Even if some people *want* to ignore me, most will feel--
--scared sick.
It's you.
You came to my cave. Now I come to yours.
As an ally, I hope?
Because I could really use you right now.
We all could.

SAGE'S LOGBOOK: TECH INTERFACE//OMEGA RED

Source of Transmission: The Pointe
Recipient: Omega Red [roaming]

<<<Testing>>>

SAGE: I'm tempted to say, "Can you hear me?" But that's not exactly how this works, is it?

OMEGA RED: What is this? You're in my head now?

SAGE: Not exactly.

OMEGA RED: Because you really, really don't want to be in my head.

SAGE: This is a comm link.

OMEGA RED: You're spying on me. Again.

SAGE: Beast doesn't have access. Only I do. And you can shut it off at any time. But if you need me...I'm here.

OMEGA RED: I don't need anyone.

SAGE: That sounds like the sort of thing I would say. But let's be honest. We all need someone. Sometimes.

OMEGA RED: ...

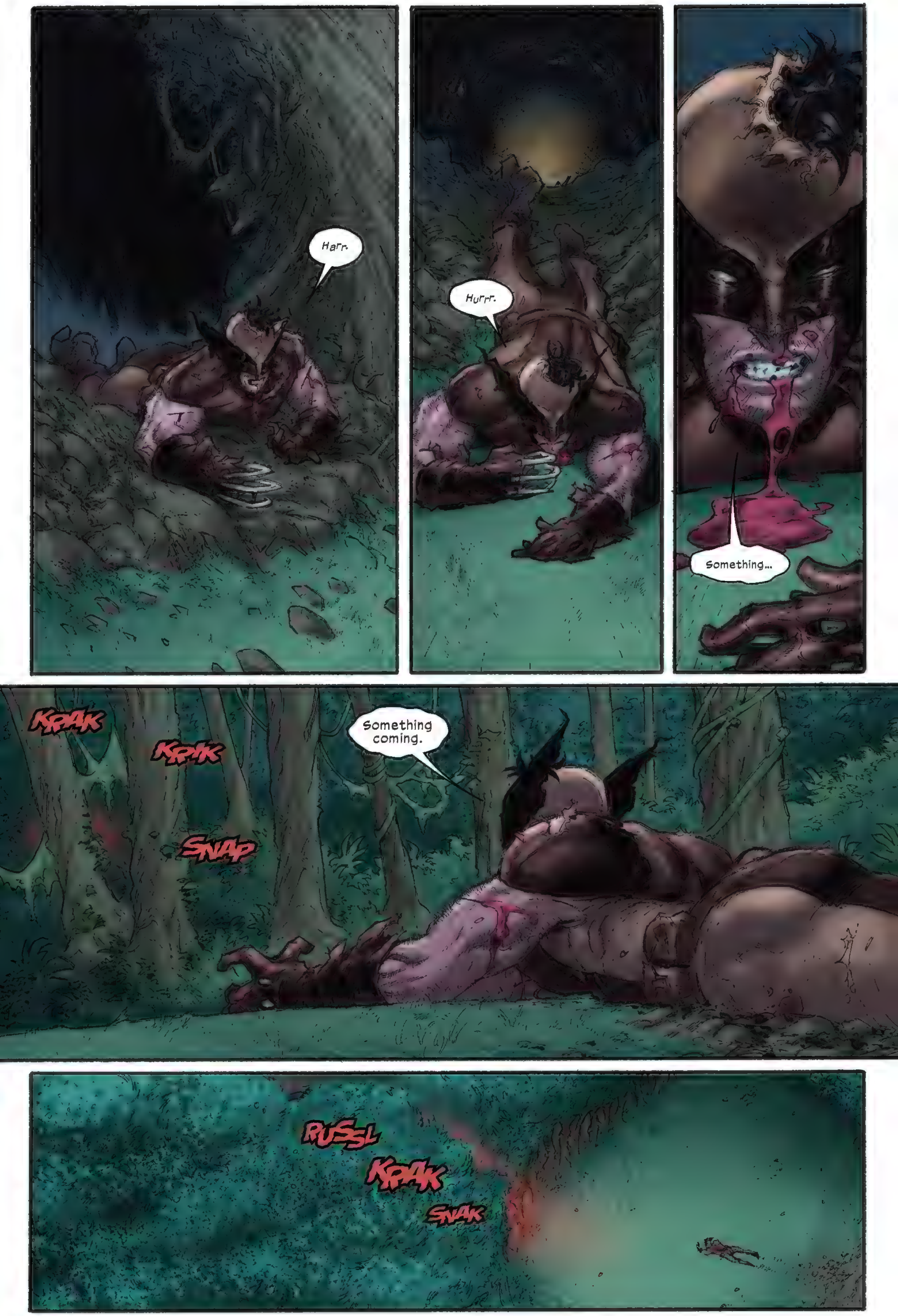
SAGE: Regardless, you should think of this connection we share as an intelligence portal. If you were to plug your tentacles into an interface, I can download information through them. And -- conversely -- we can upload information as well.

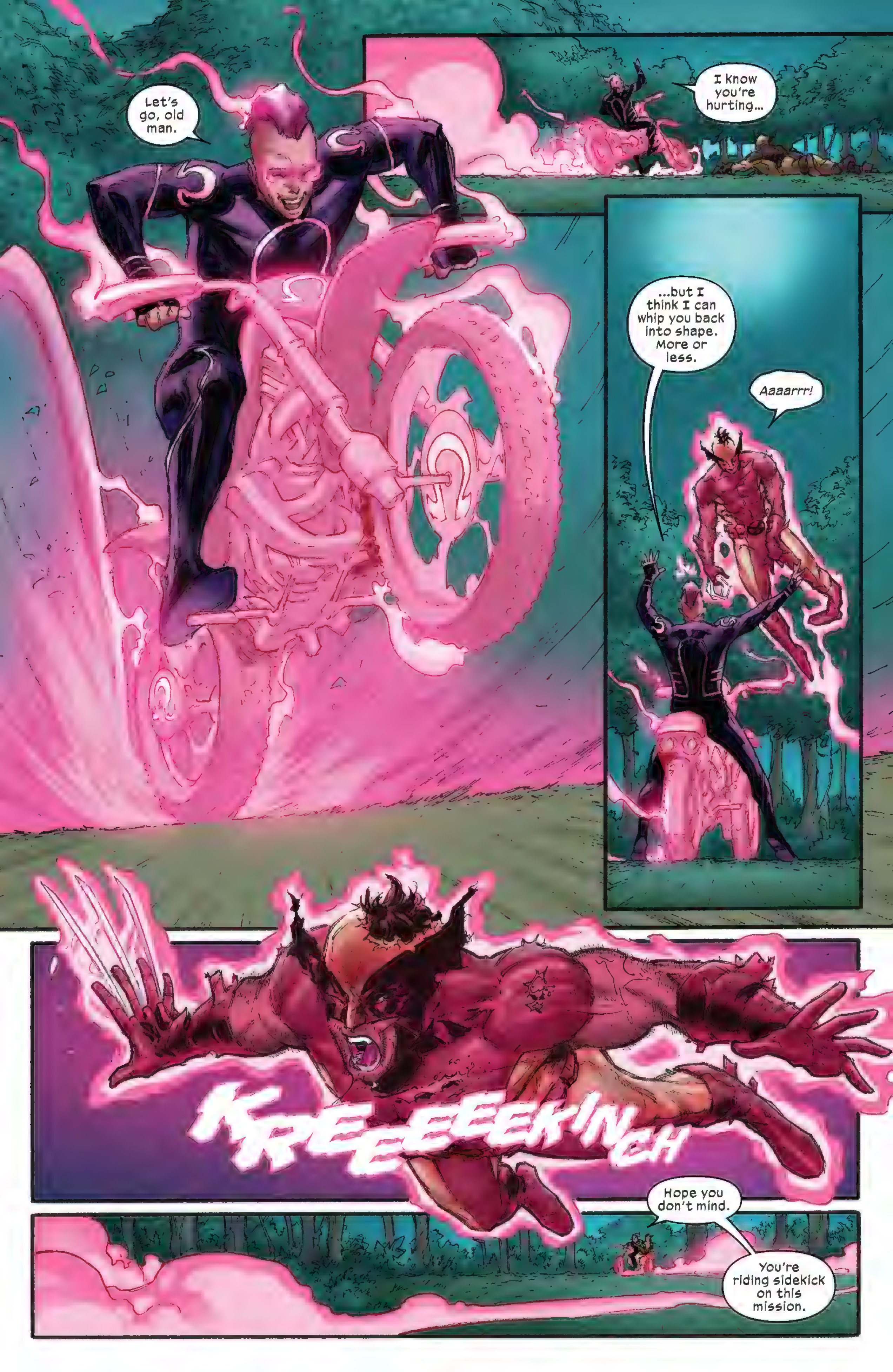
OMEGA RED: Like a virus.

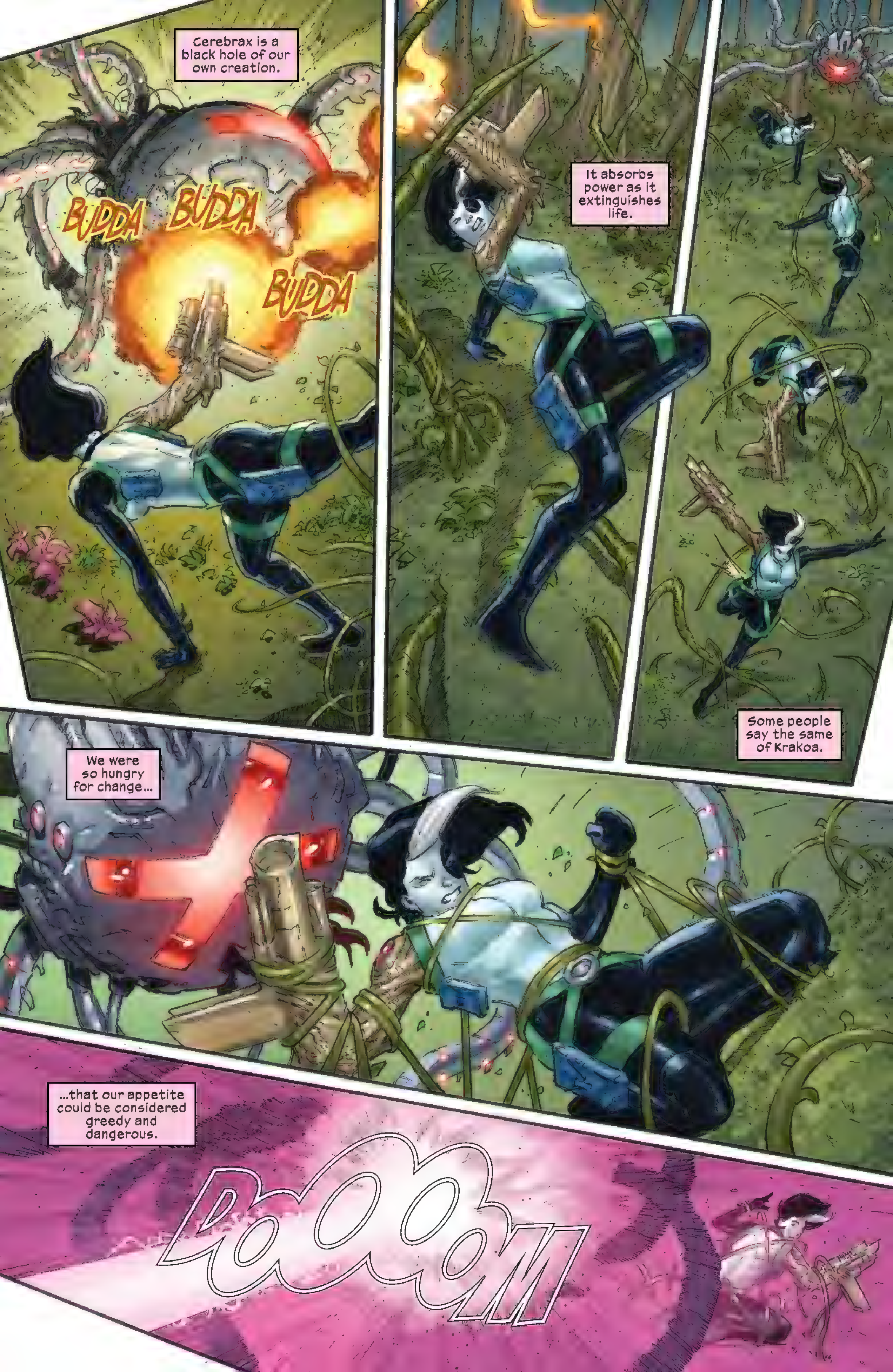
SAGE: If we wanted to, yes. We could upload a virus.

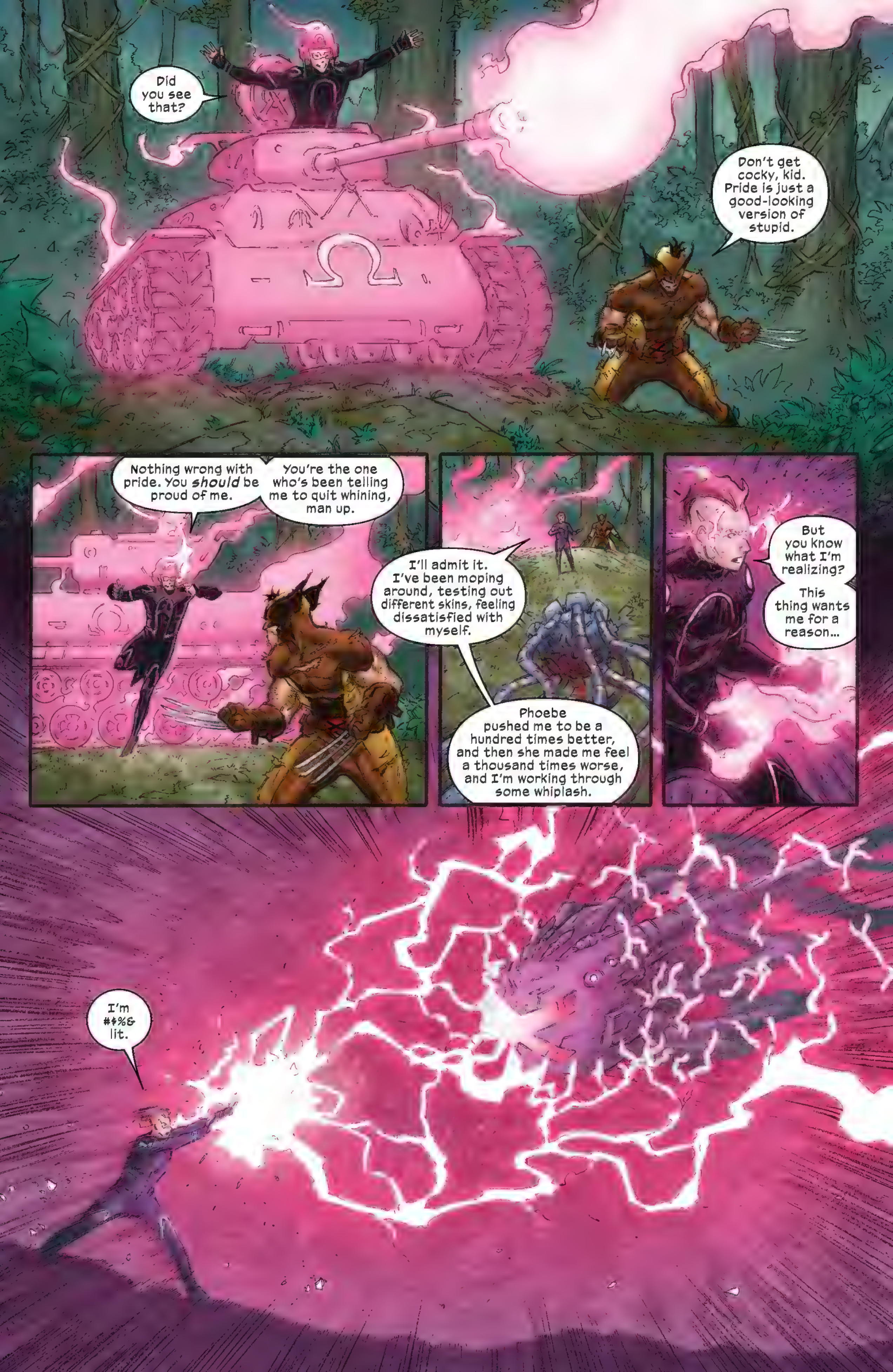
OMEGA RED: That's quiet work. I'm used to breaking and whipping and punching and strangling things.

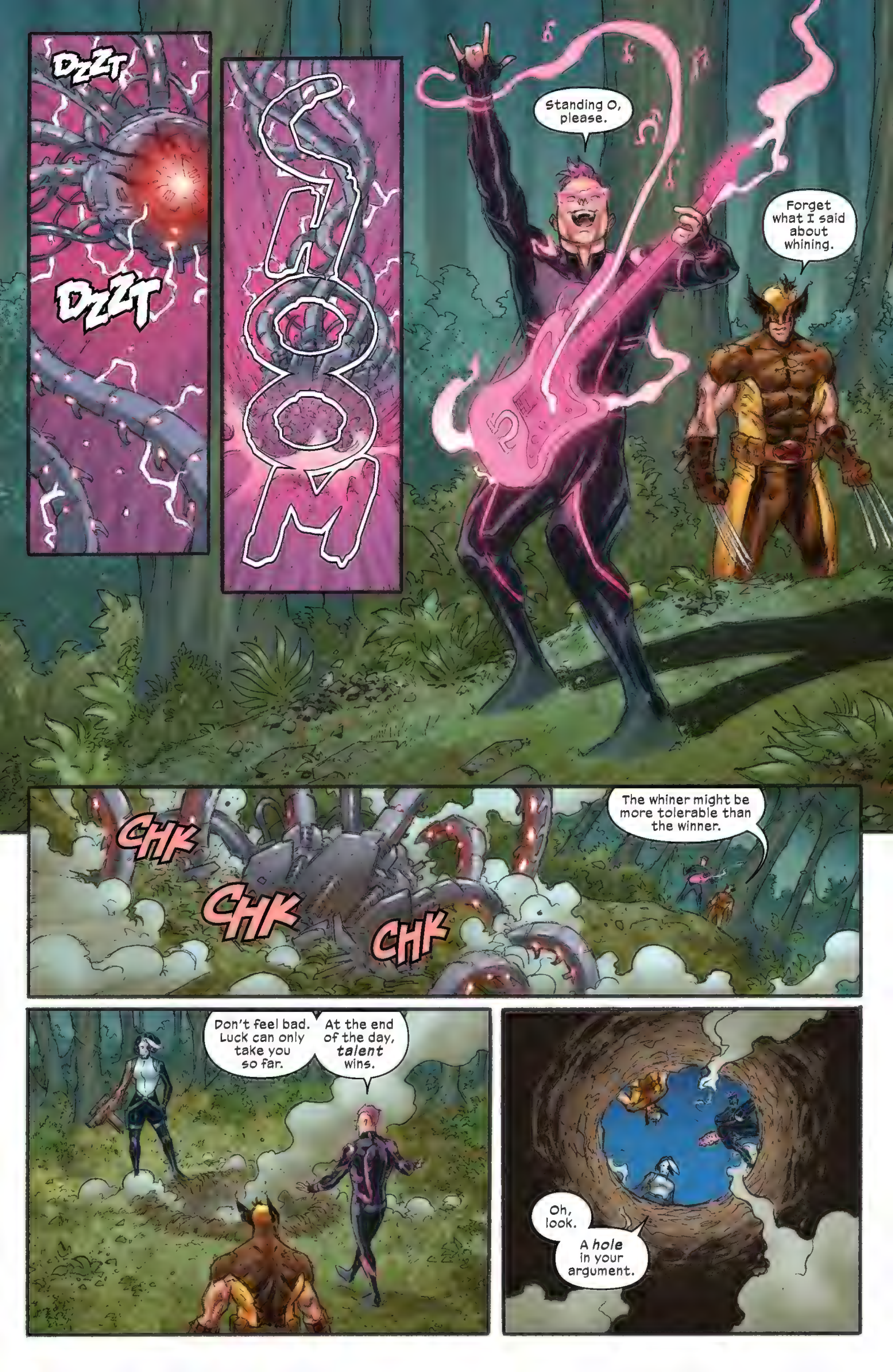
SAGE: You can go on doing that as well. In fact, we're counting on it.

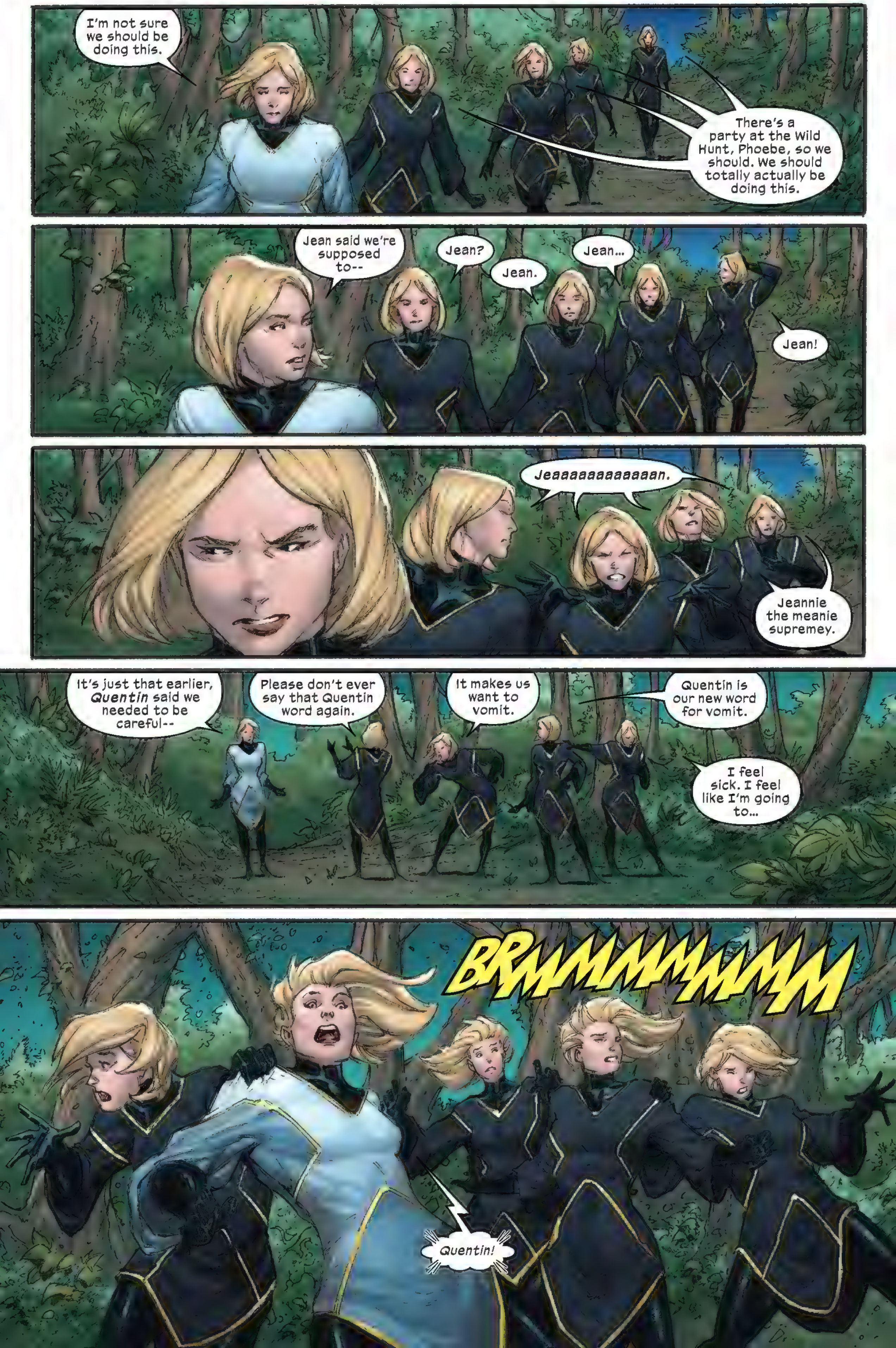

Harr.
Hurrr.
Something...
KRAK
KRAK
SNAP
Something coming.
RUSSL
KRAK
SNAK

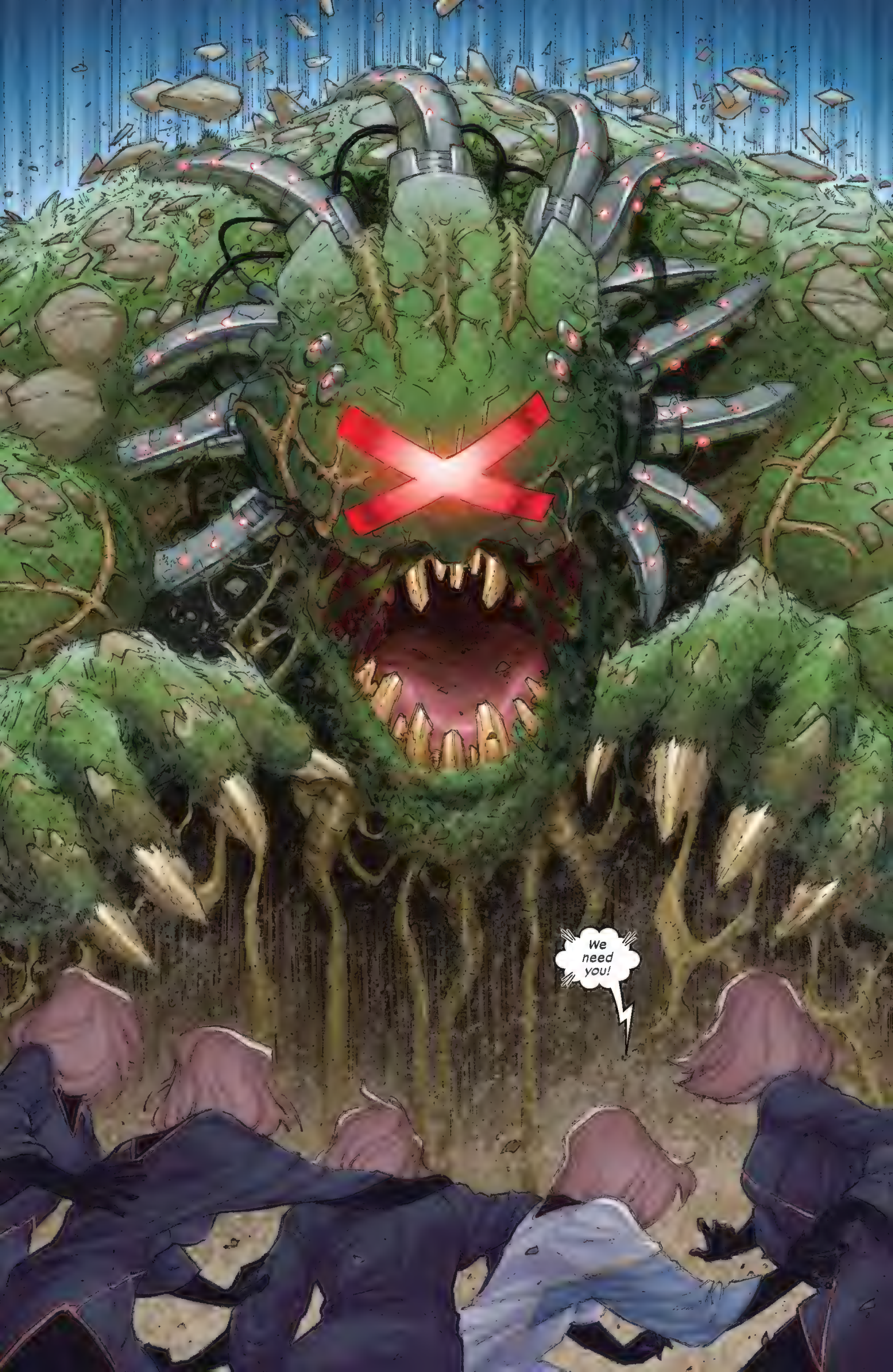

Let's go, old man.
I know you're hurting...
...but I think I can whip you back into shape. More or less.
Aaaarrr!
KREEEEEEKINCH
Hope you don't mind.
You're riding sidekick on this mission.

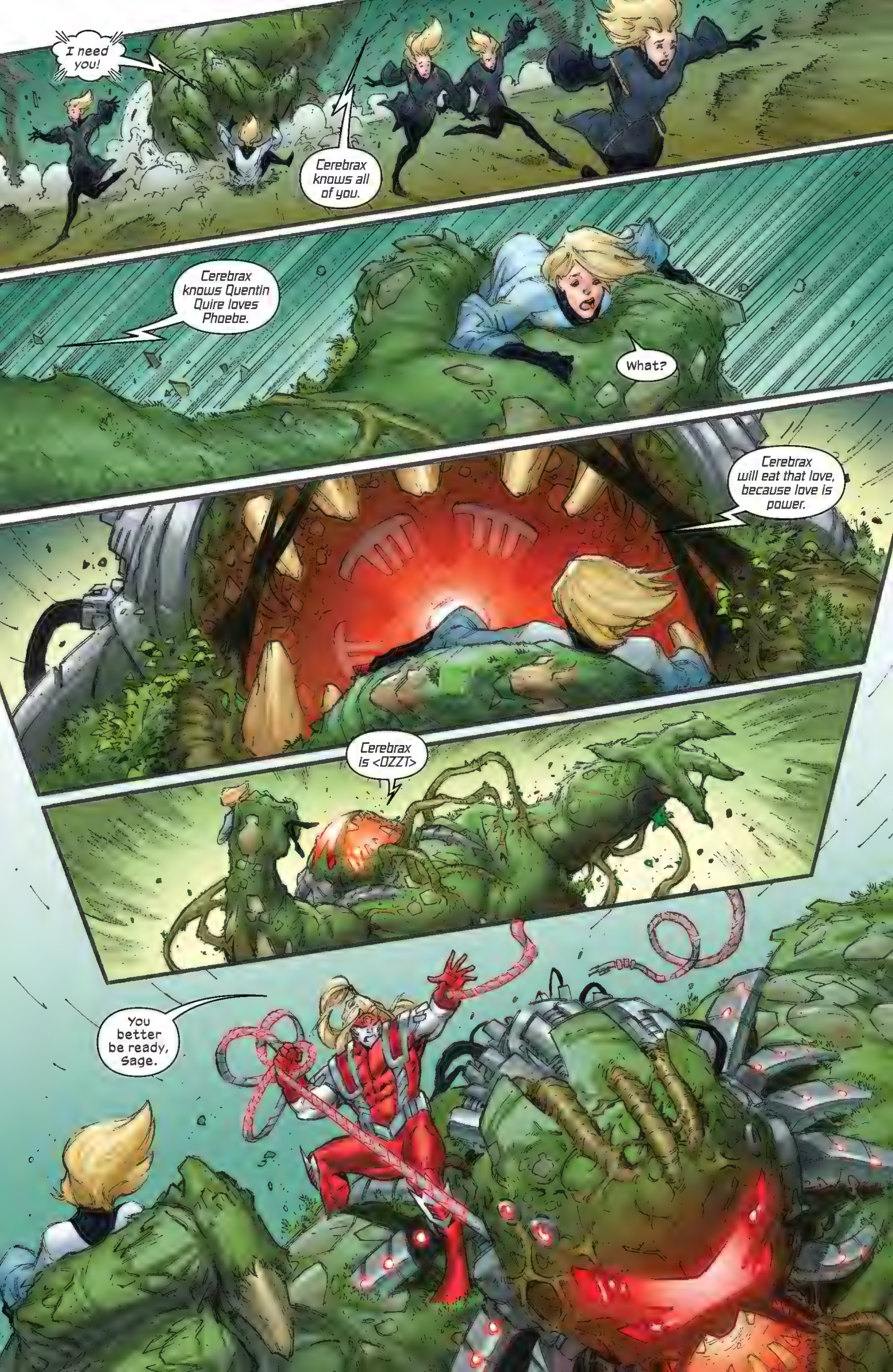

Cerebrax is a black hole of our own creation.
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
It absorbs power as it extinguishes life.
Some people say the same of Krakoa.
We were so hungry for change...
...that our appetite could be considered greedy and dangerous.
DOOOOM

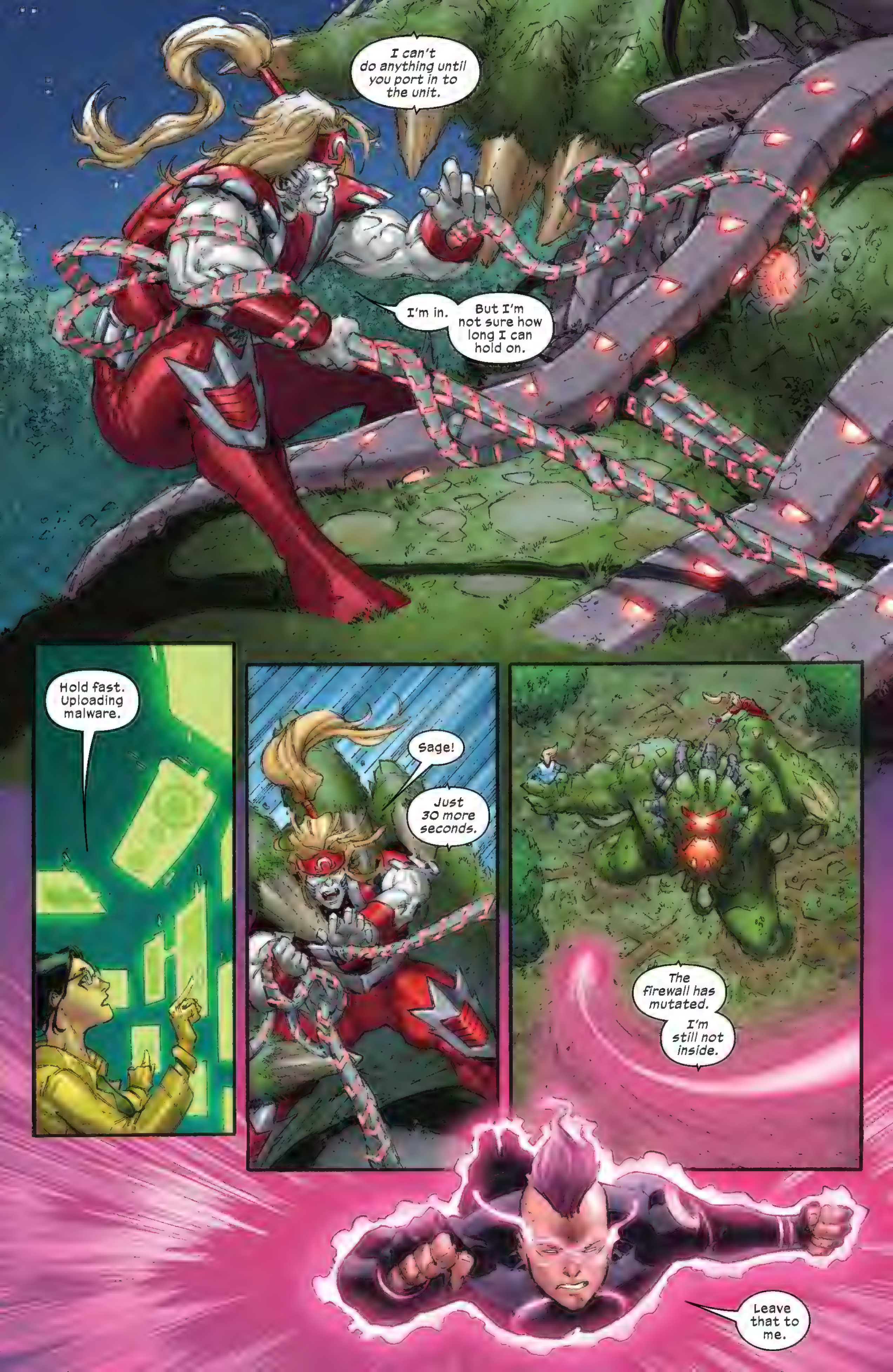

Did you see that?
Don't get cocky, kid. Pride is just a good-looking version of stupid.
Nothing wrong with pride. You *should* be proud of me.
You're the one who's been telling me to quit whining, man up.
I'll admit it. I've been moping around, testing out different skins, feeling dissatisfied with myself.
Phoebe pushed me to be a hundred times better, and then she made me feel a thousand times worse, and I'm working through some whiplash.
But you know what I'm realizing?
This thing wants me for a reason...
I'm #$%& lit.

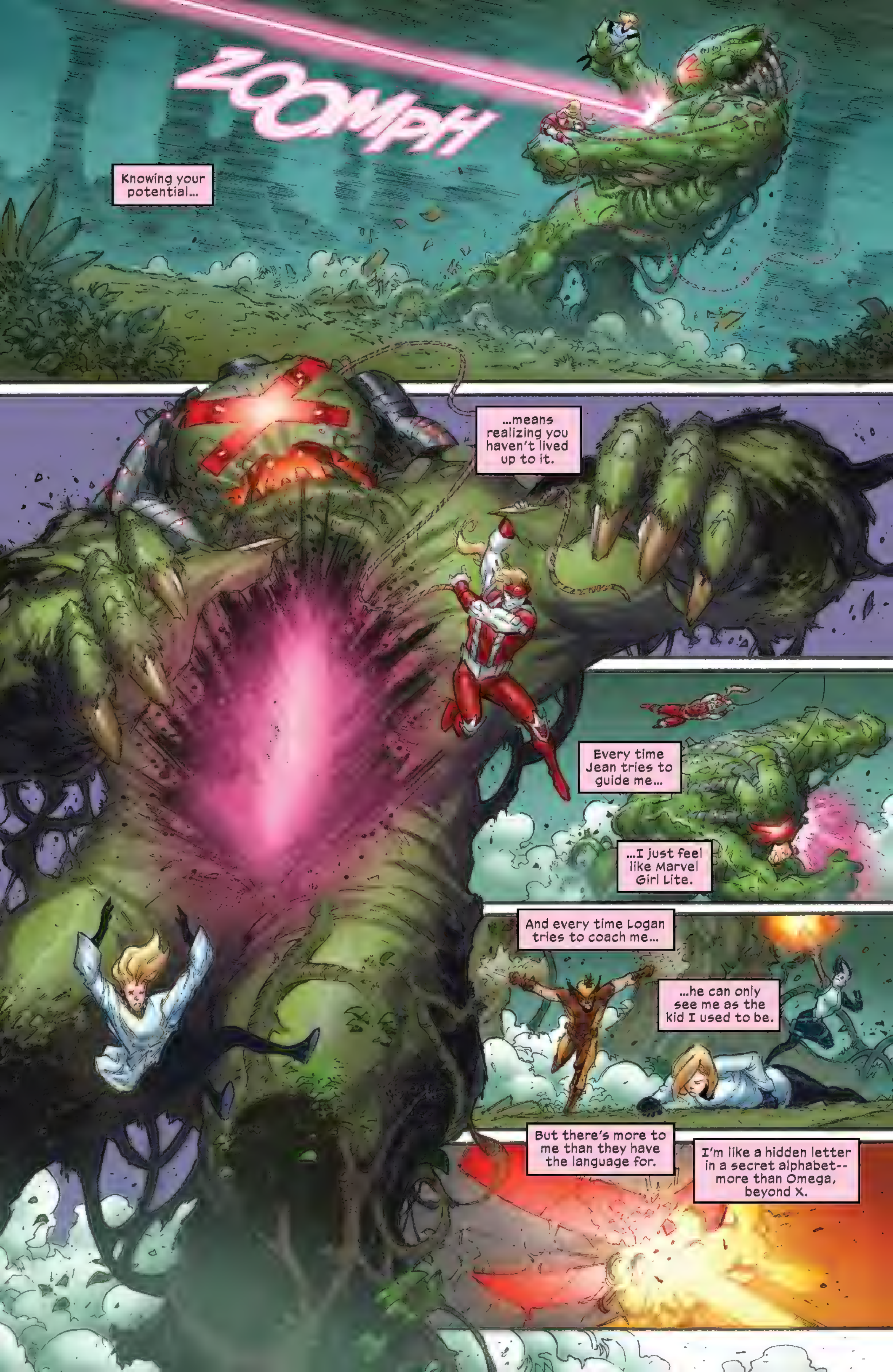

DZZT
DZZT
SHOOM
Standing O, please.
Forget what I said about whining.
CHK
CHK
CHK
The whiner might be more tolerable than the winner.
Don't feel bad. Luck can only take you so far.
At the end of the day, *talent* wins.
Oh, look.
A *hole* in your argument.

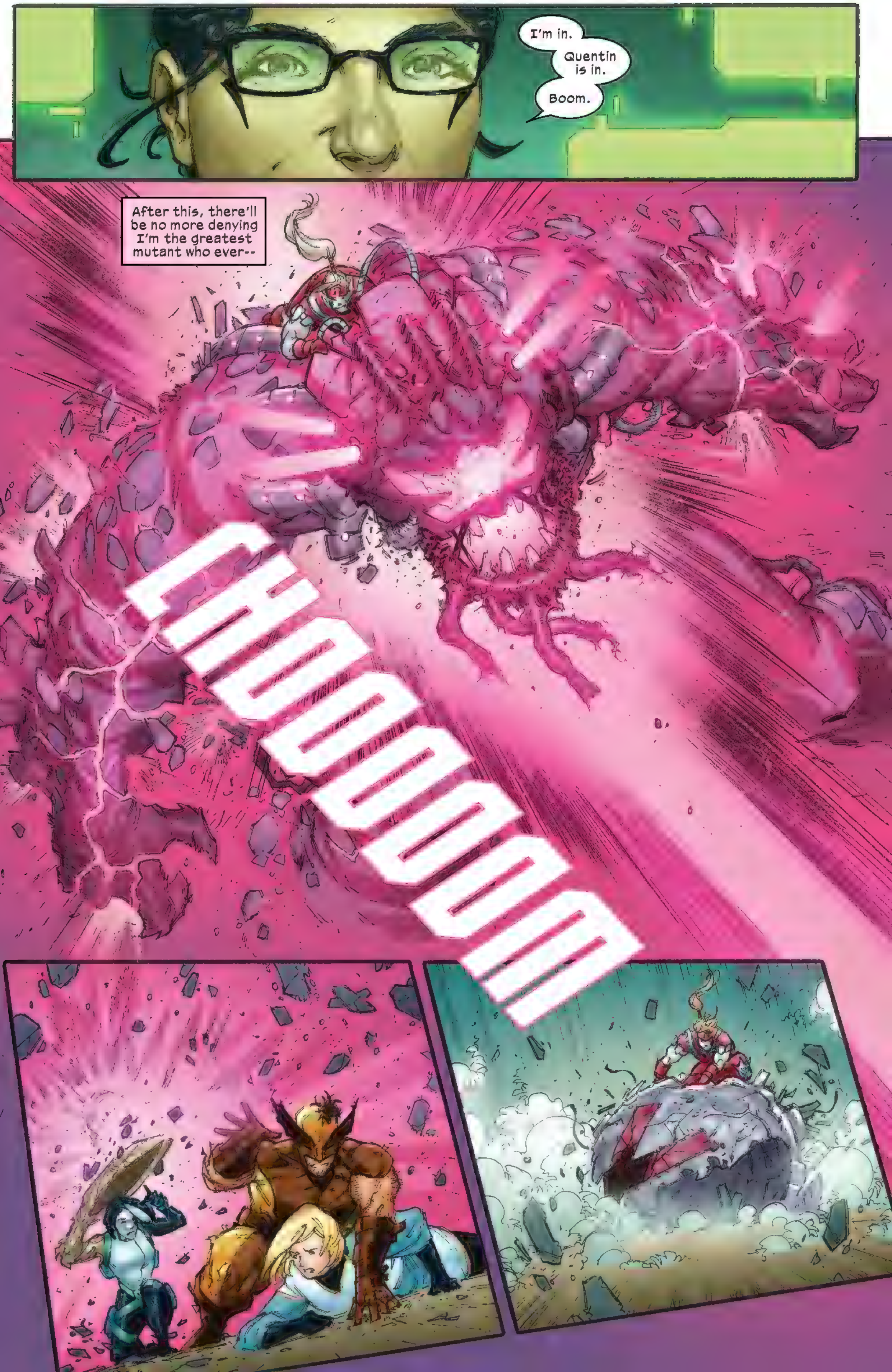

I'm not sure we should be doing this.
There's a party at the Wild Hunt, Phoebe, so we should. We should totally actually be doing this.
Jean said we're supposed to--
Jean?
Jean.
Jean...
Jean!
Jeaaaaaaaaaaaaan.
Jeannie the meanie supremey.
It's just that earlier, *Quentin* said we needed to be careful--
Please don't ever say that Quentin word again.
It makes us want to vomit.
Quentin is our new word for vomit.
I feel sick. I feel like I'm going to...
BRMMMMMMM
Quentin!

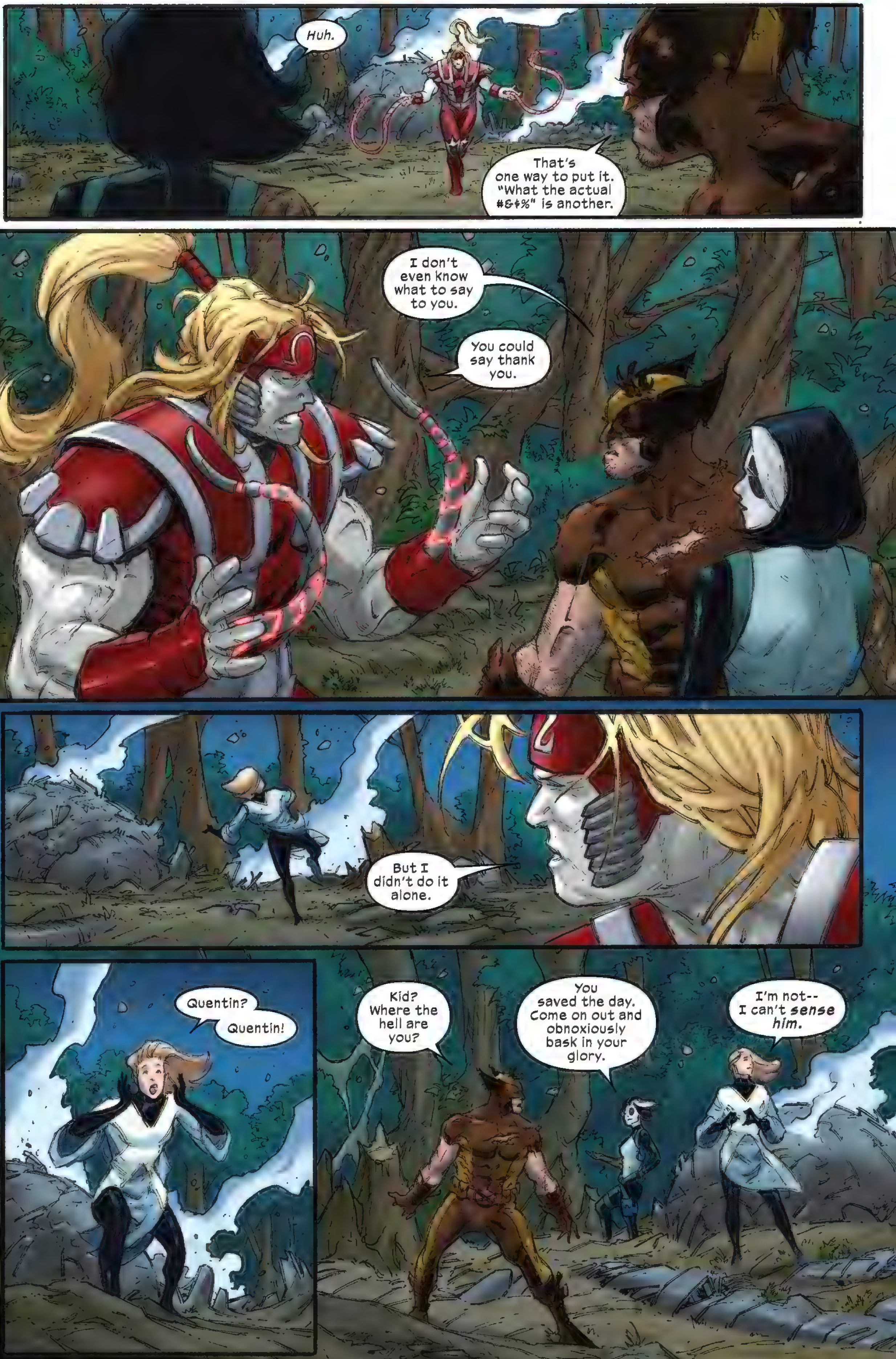

We need you!

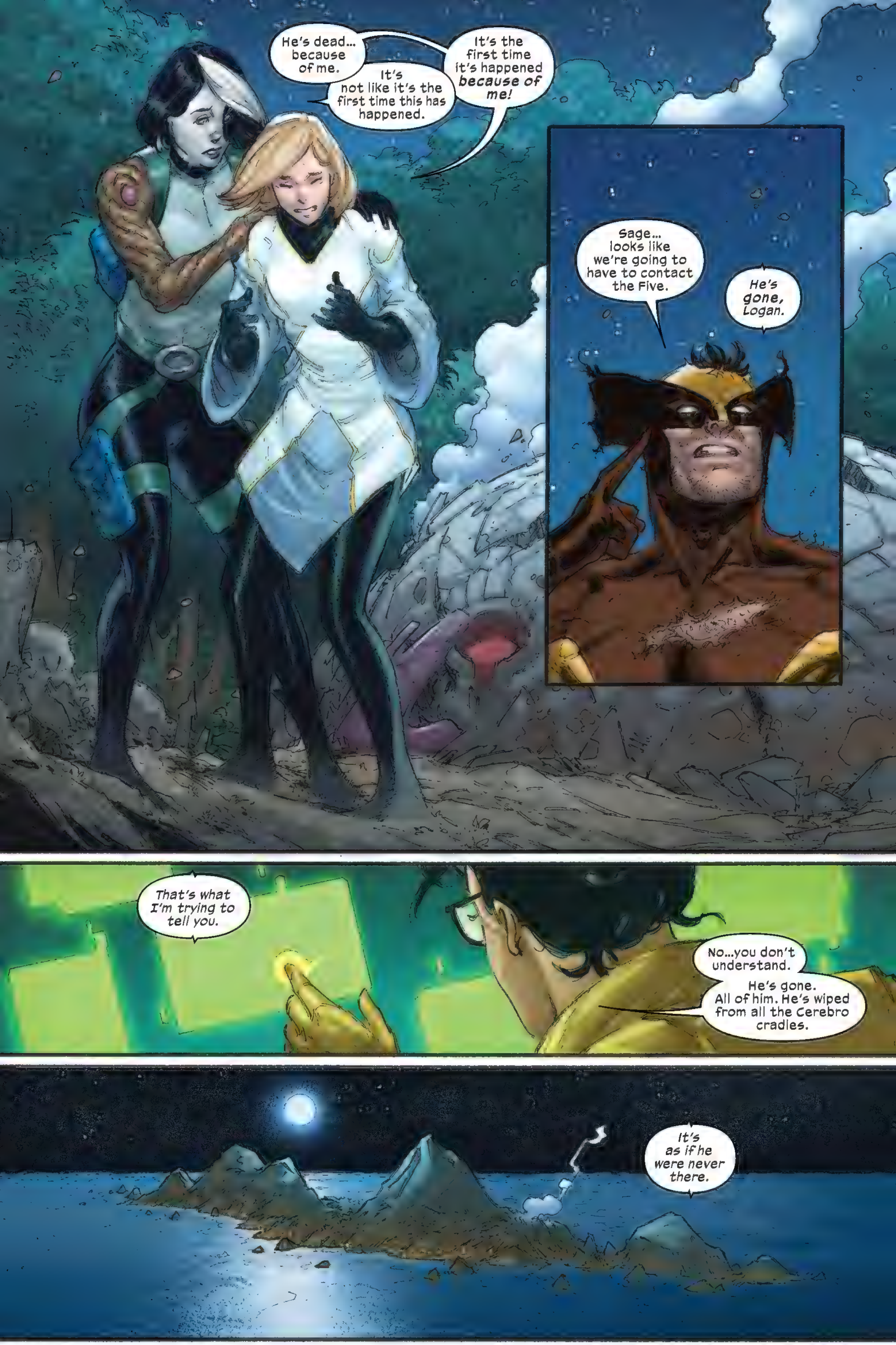

I need you!
Cerebrax knows all of you.
Cerebrax knows Quentin Quire loves Phoebe.
What?
Cerebrax will eat that love, because love is power.
Cerebrax is <DZZT>
You better be ready, Sage.


I can't do anything until you port in to the unit.
I'm in.
But I'm not sure how long I can hold on.
Hold fast. Uploading malware.
Sage!
Just 30 more seconds.
The firewall has mutated.
I'm still not inside.
Leave that to me.


ZOOMPH
Knowing your potential...
...means realizing you haven't lived up to it.
Every time Jean tries to guide me...
...I just feel like Marvel Girl Lite.
And every time Logan tries to coach me...
...he can only see me as the kid I used to be.
But there's more to me than they have the language for.
I'm like a hidden letter in a secret alphabet--more than Omega, beyond X.


I'm in.
Quentin is in.
Boom.
After this, there'll be no more denying I'm the greatest mutant who ever--
CHOOOOOM


Huh.
That's one way to put it. "What the actual #&¢%" is another.
I don't even know what to say to you.
You could say thank you.
But I didn't do it alone.
Quentin?
Quentin!
Kid? Where the hell are you?
You saved the day. Come on out and obnoxiously bask in your glory.
I'm not-- I can't *sense* *him.*


He's dead… because of me.
It's not like it's the first time this has happened.
It's the first time it's happened *because of me!*
Sage… looks like we're going to have to contact the Five.
He's *gone,* Logan.
That's what I'm trying to tell you.
No…you don't understand.
He's gone. All of him. He's wiped from all the Cerebro cradles.
It's as if he were never there.

[quentin…[0.X]
[quire………[0.X]

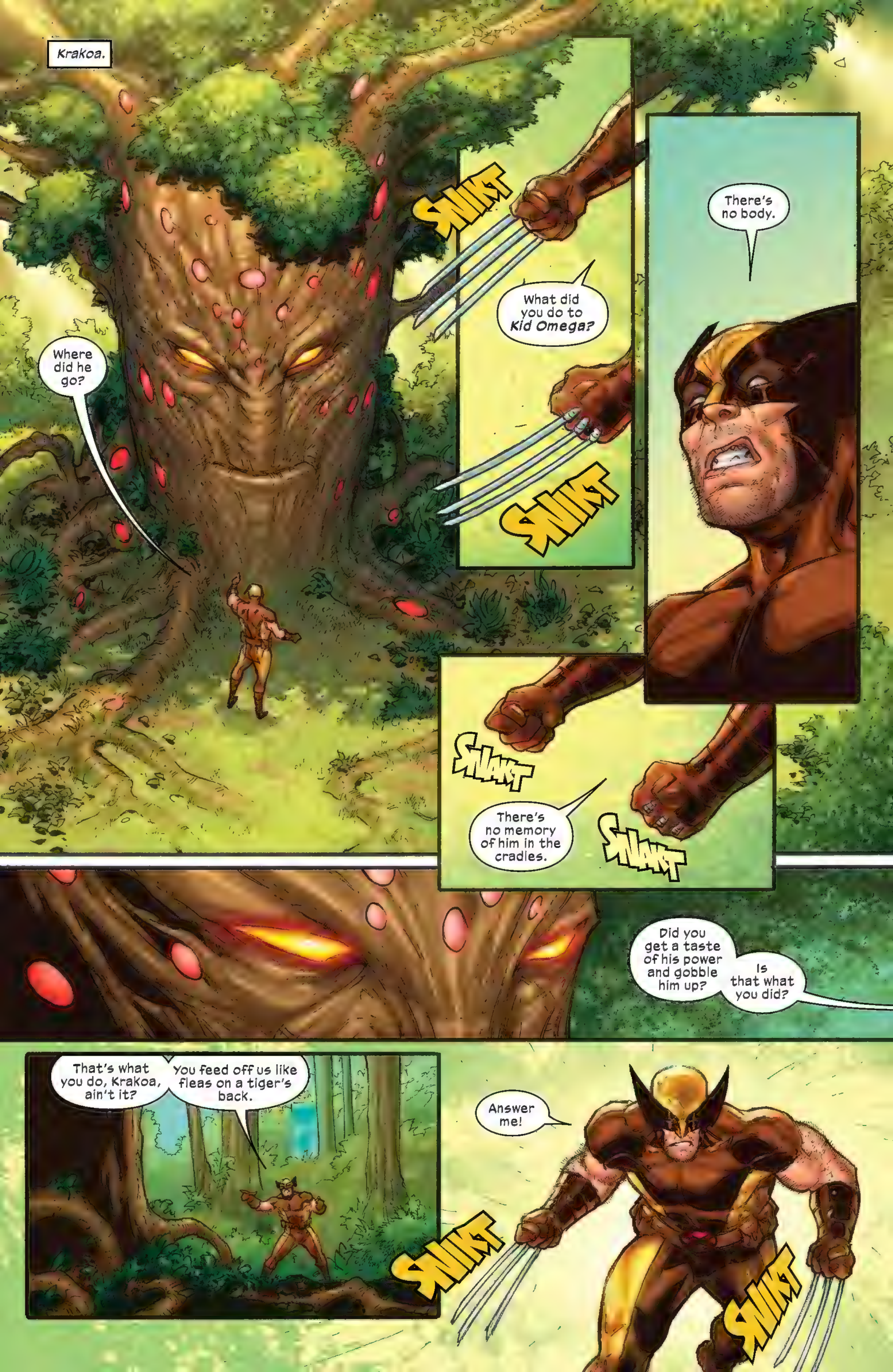
“There’s more. To me. To the world. I know it. I can feel it. I just haven’t found it. Yet.”

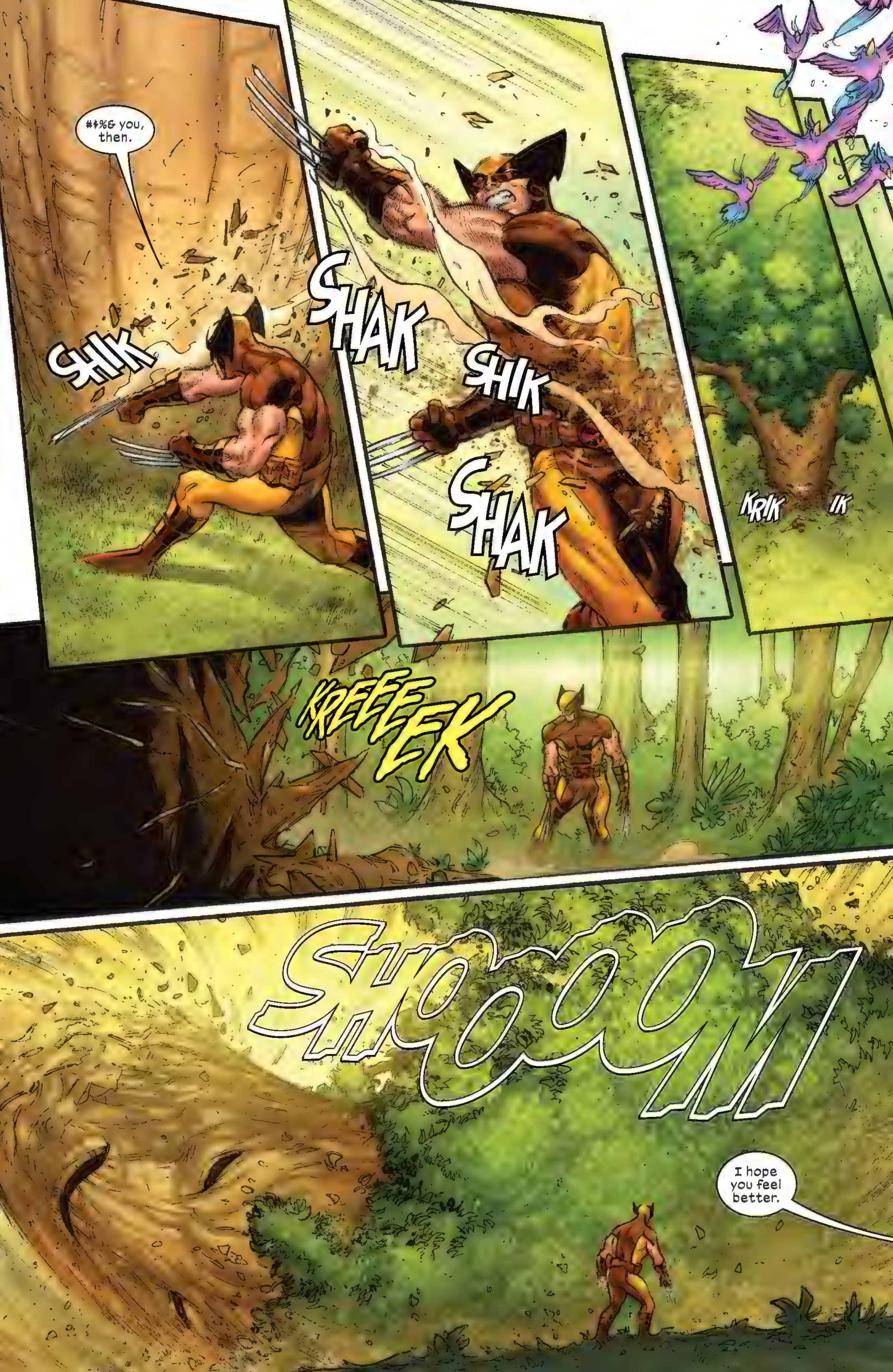
-- KID OMEGA

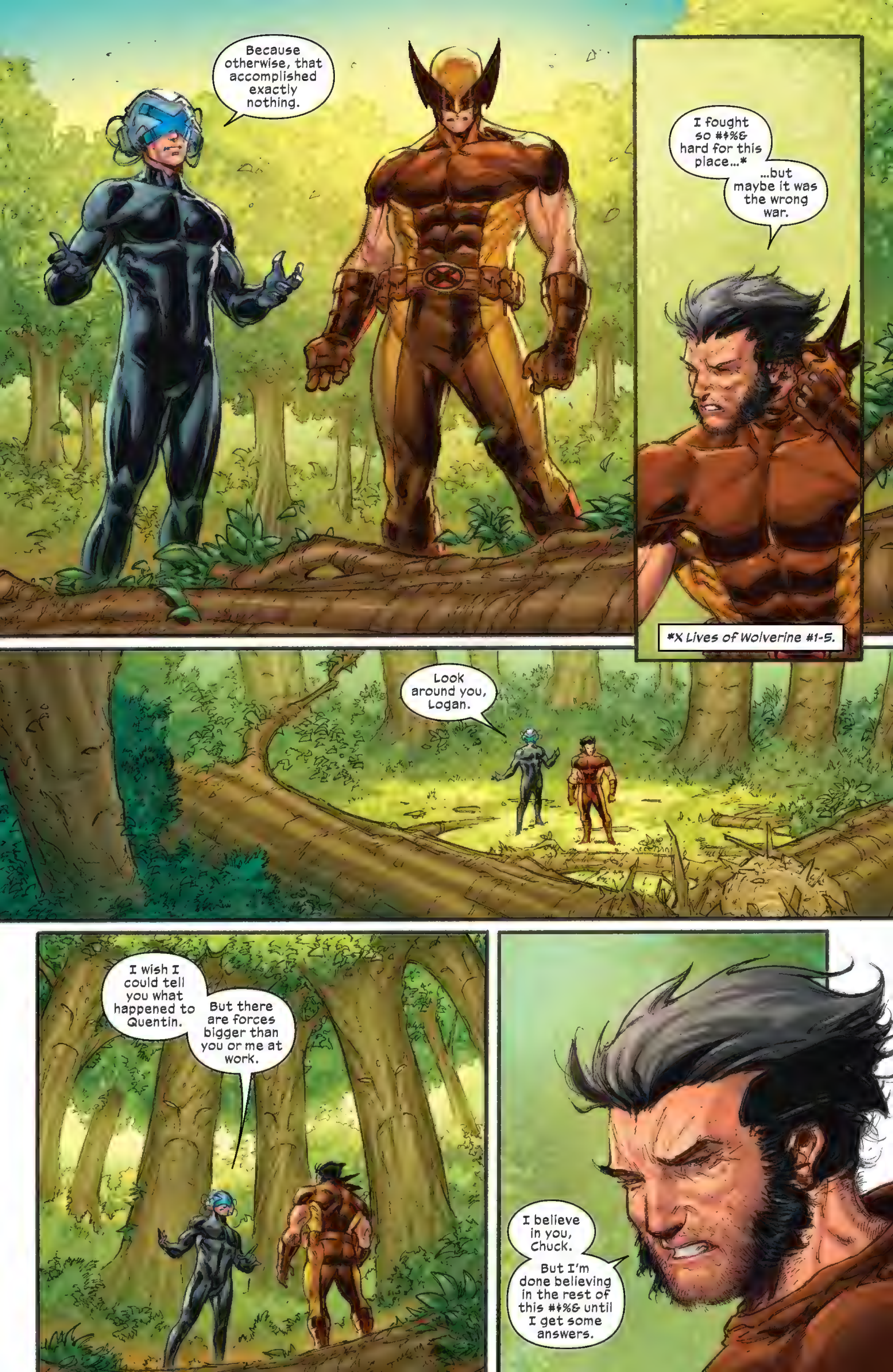
[quentin…[0.X]
[quire………[0.X]

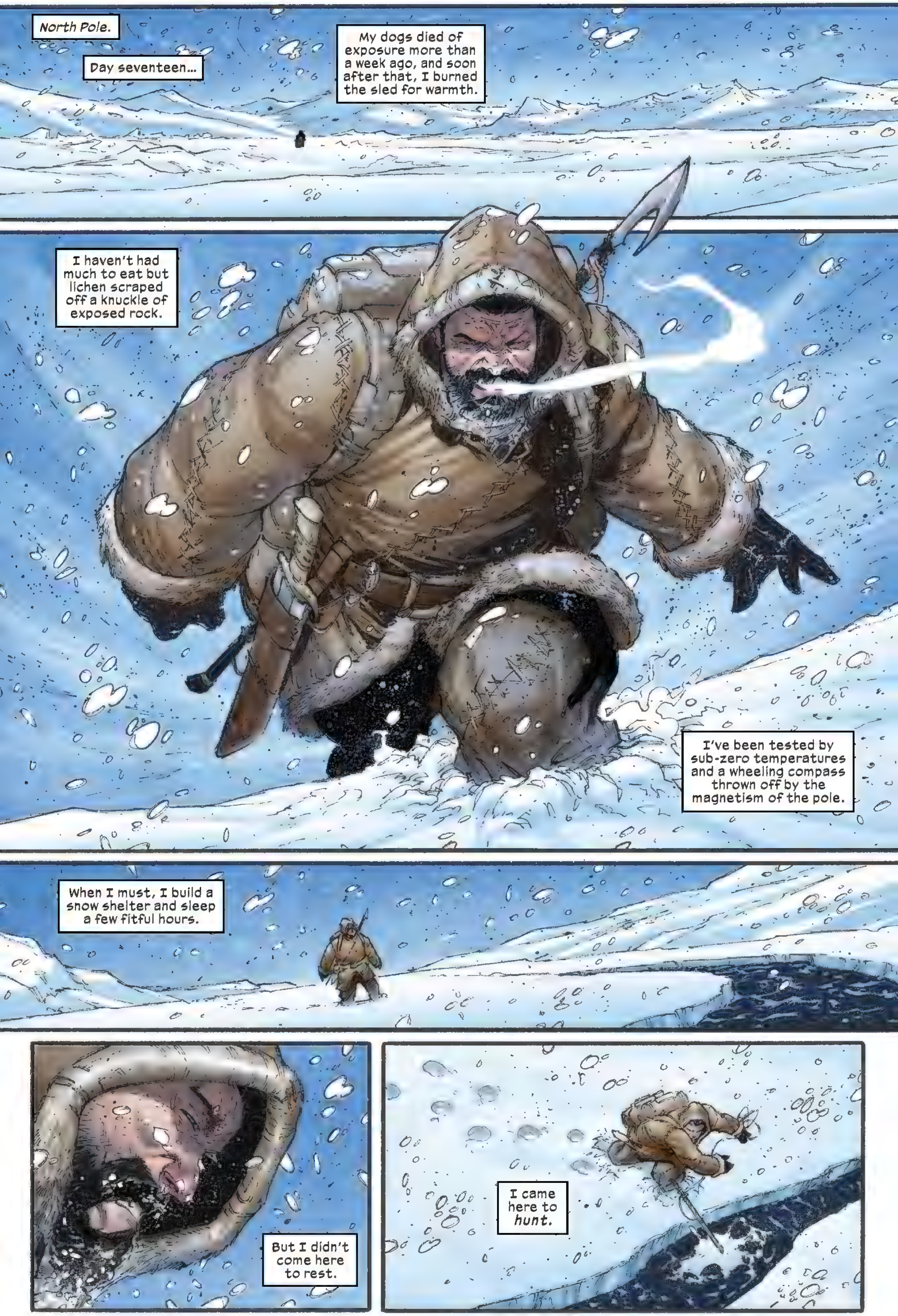
The Hunt for X Part 1: Dawn of the Hunt

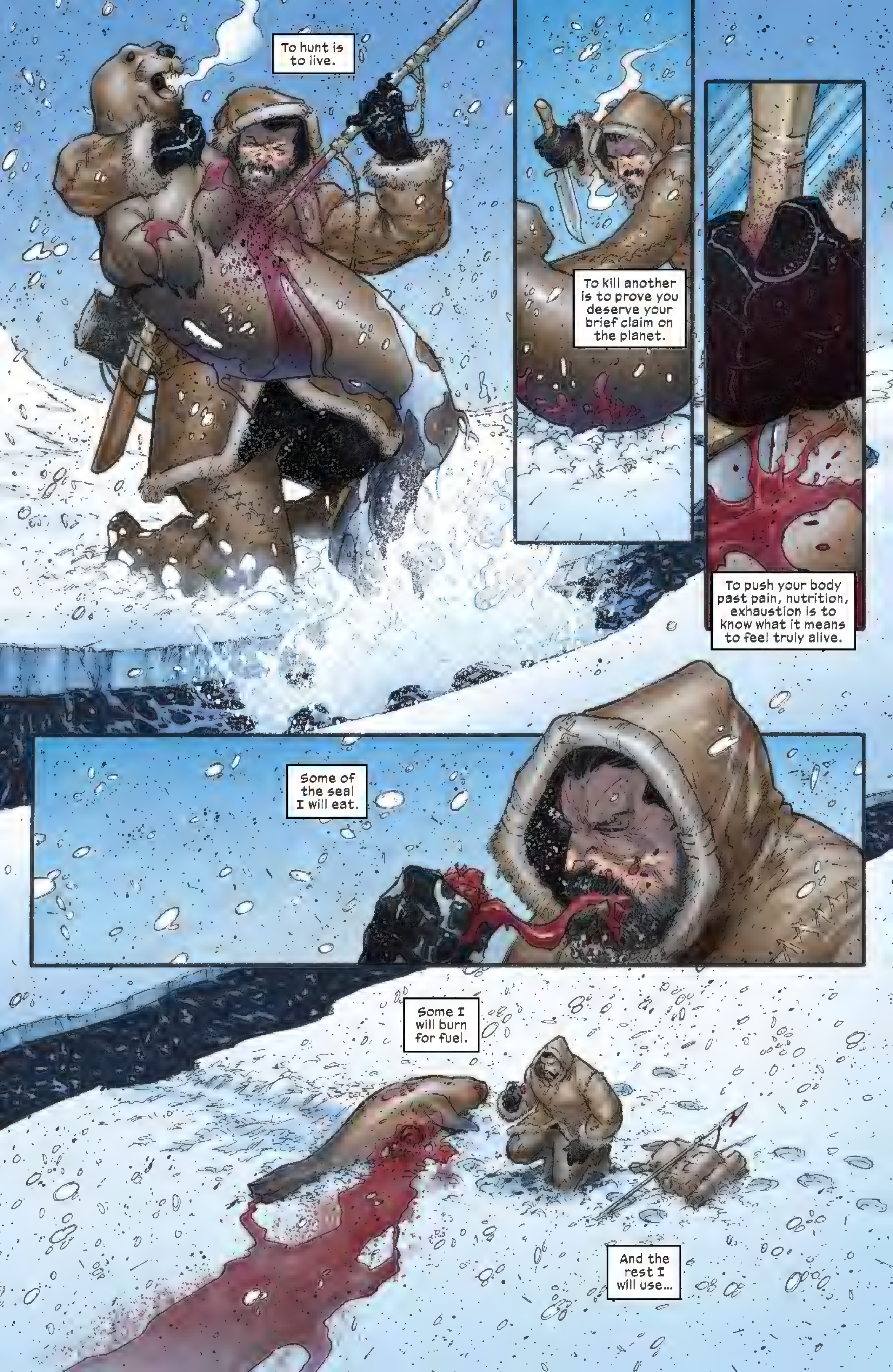
30

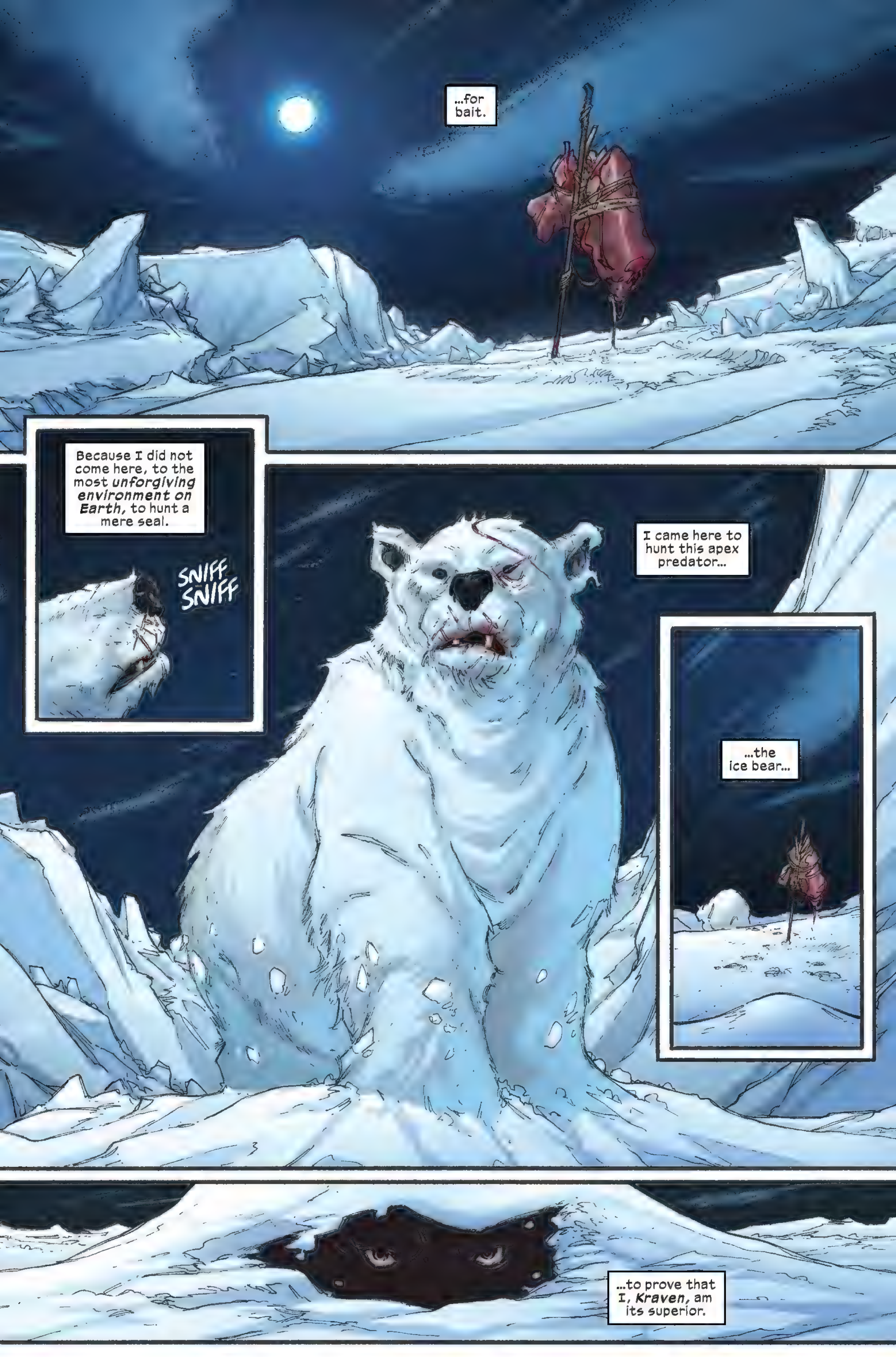

Krakoa.
Where did he go?
SNIKT
What did you do to *Kid Omega?*
SNIKT
There's no body.
SNAKT
There's no memory of him in the cradles.
SNAKT
Did you get a taste of his power and gobble him up?
Is that what you did?
That's what you do, Krakoa, ain't it?
You feed off us like fleas on a tiger's back.
Answer me!
SNIKT
SNIKT

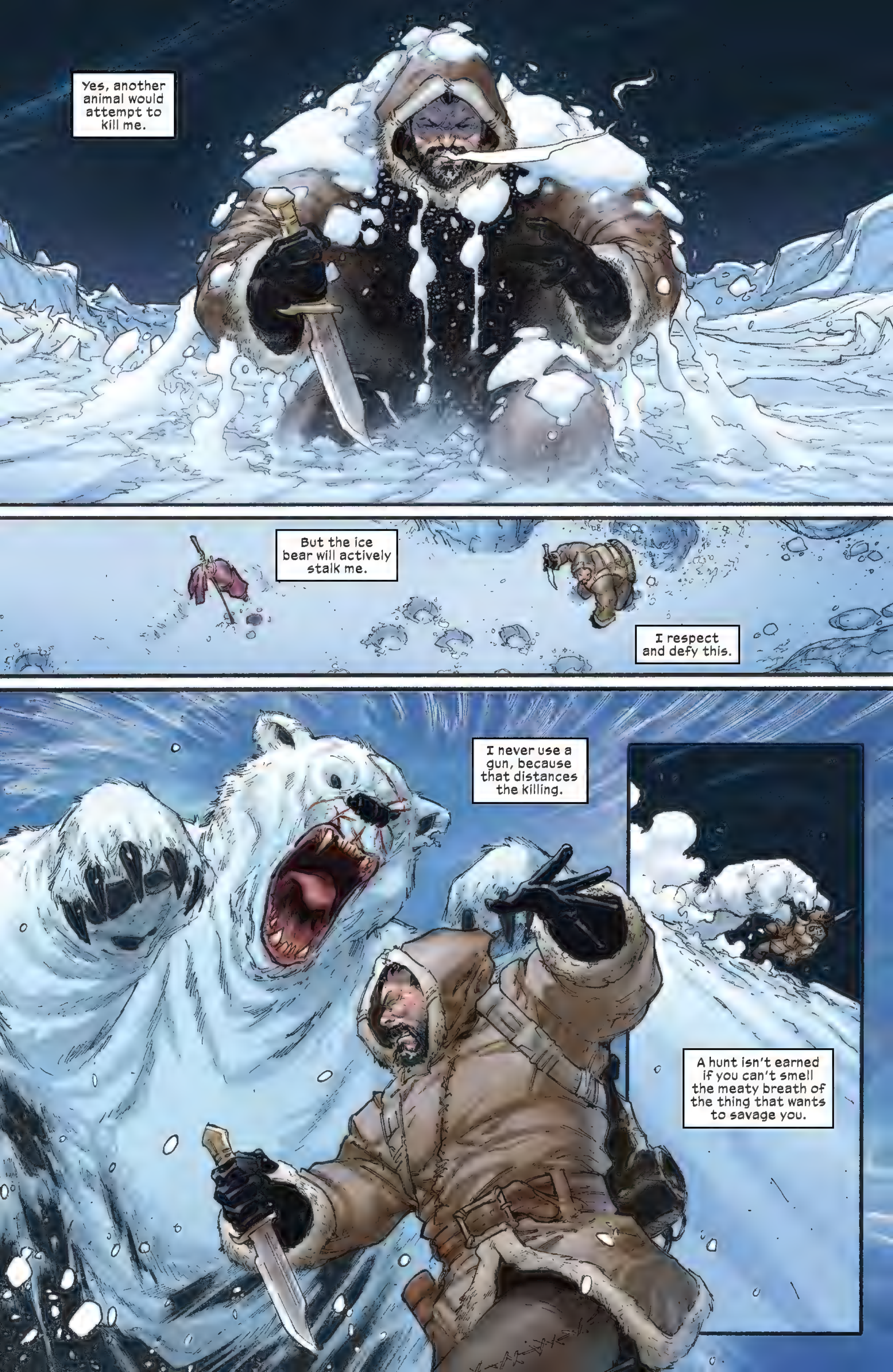

#$%& you, then.
SHIK
SHAK
SHIK
SHAK
KRIK
IK
KREEEEK
SHOOOOM
I hope you feel better.

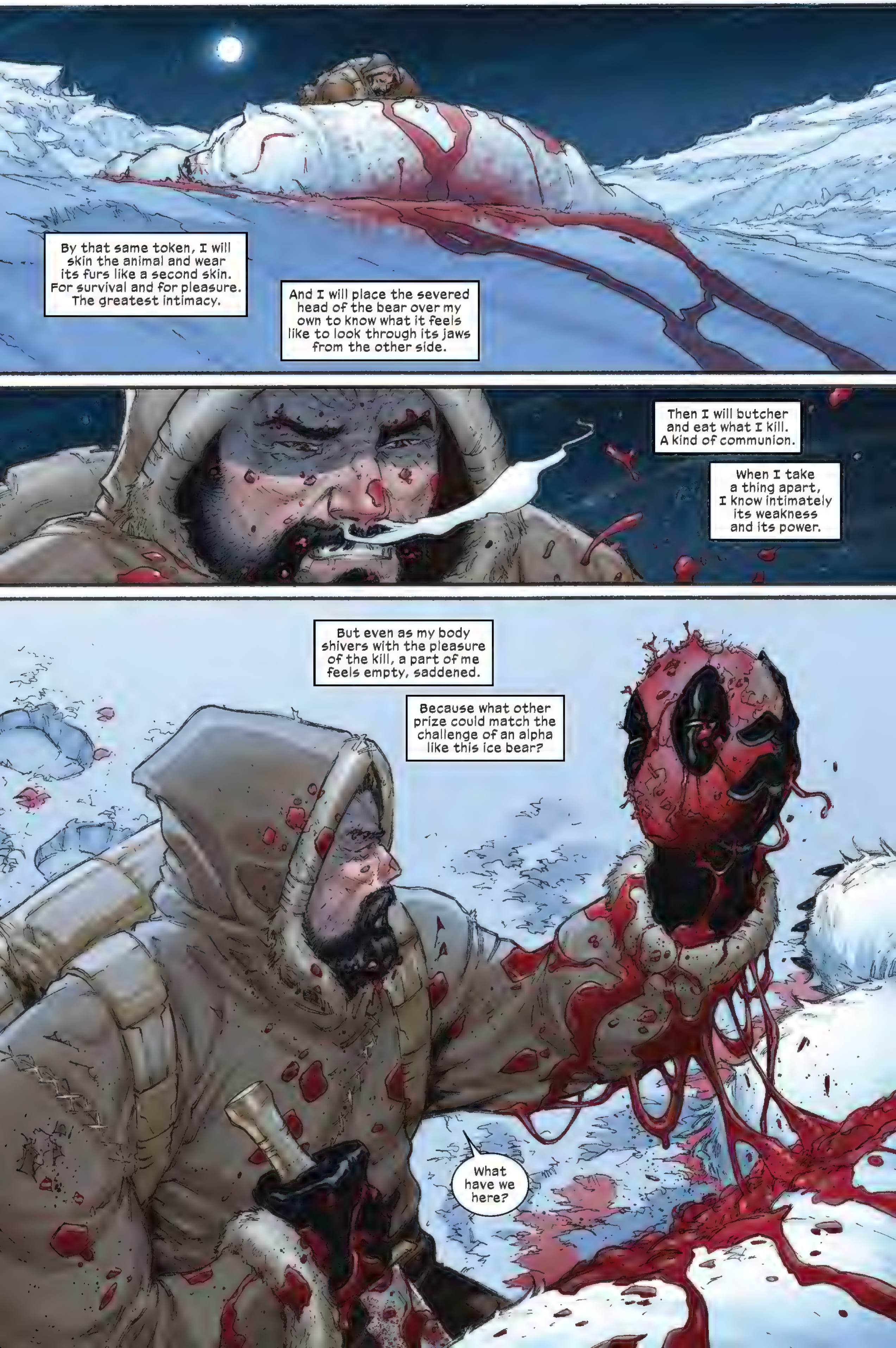

Because otherwise, that accomplished exactly nothing.
I fought so #$%& hard for this place...*
...but maybe it was the wrong war.
*X Lives of Wolverine #1-5.
Look around you, Logan.
I wish I could tell you what happened to Quentin.
But there are forces bigger than you or me at work.
I believe in you, Chuck.
But I'm done believing in the rest of this #$%& until I get some answers.

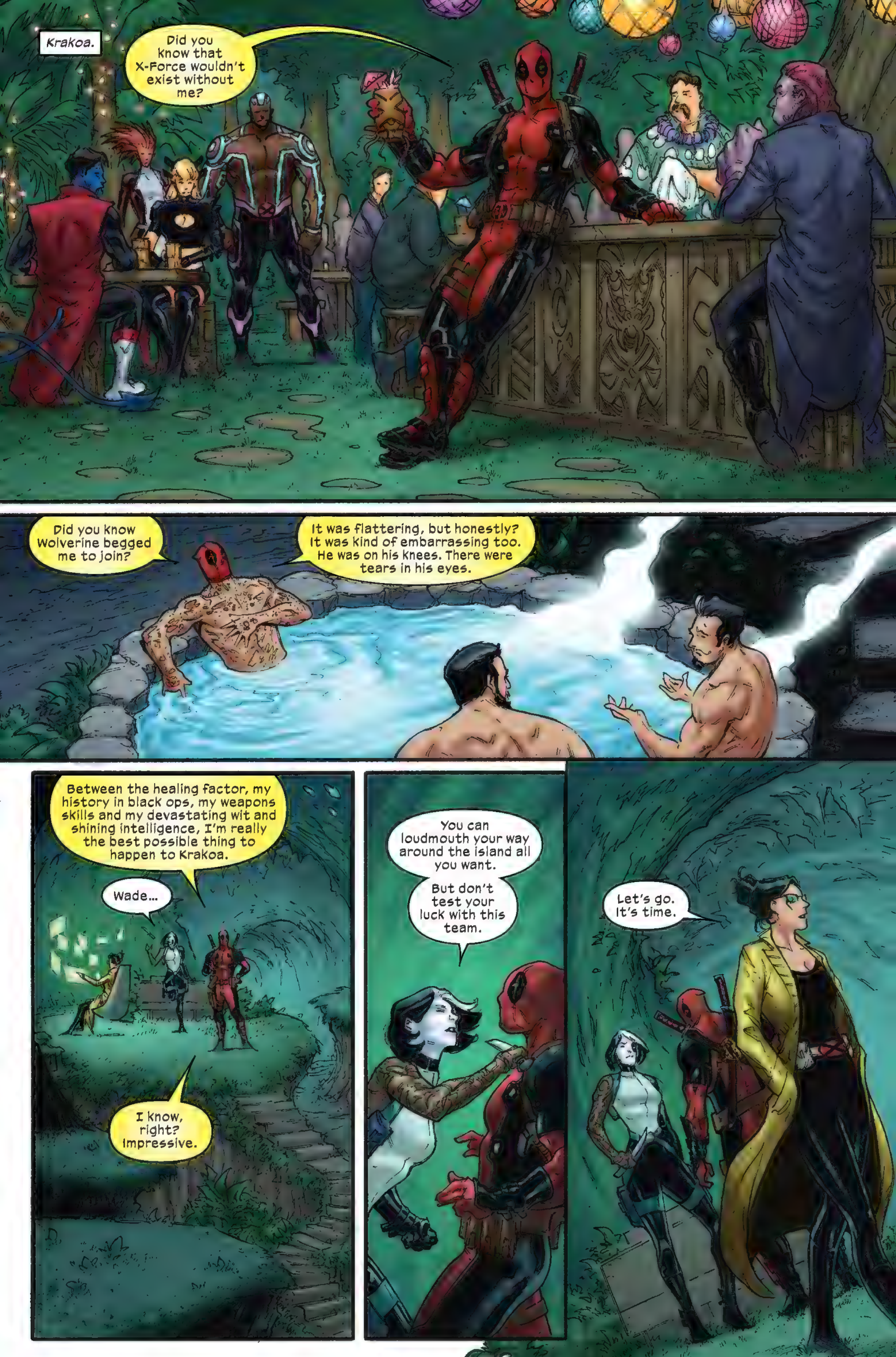

North Pole.
Day seventeen...
My dogs died of exposure more than a week ago, and soon after that, I burned the sled for warmth.
I haven't had much to eat but lichen scraped off a knuckle of exposed rock.
I've been tested by sub-zero temperatures and a wheeling compass thrown off by the magnetism of the pole.
When I must, I build a snow shelter and sleep a few fitful hours.
But I didn't come here to rest.
I came here to *hunt*.

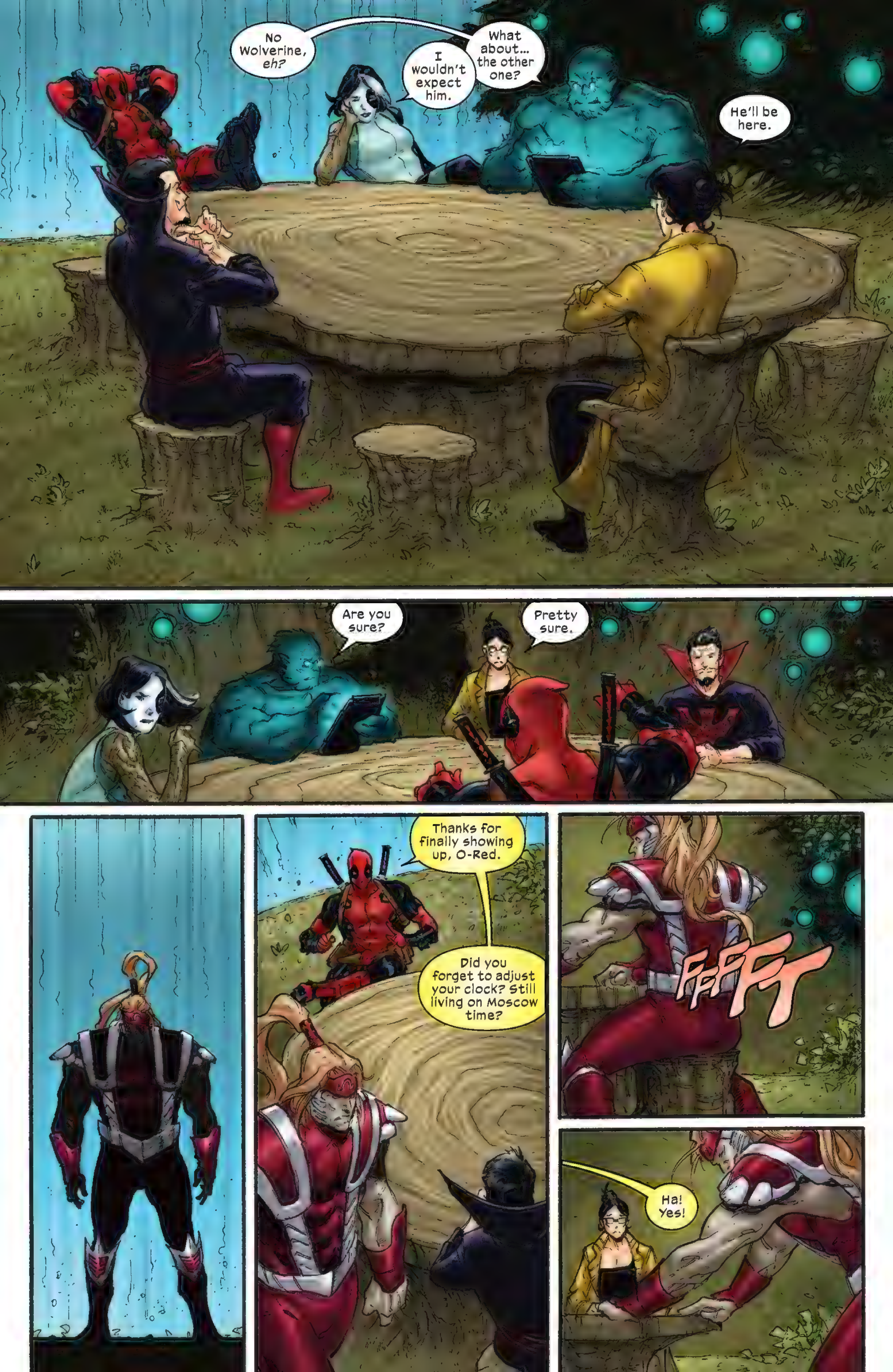

To hunt is to live.
To kill another is to prove you deserve your brief claim on the planet.
To push your body past pain, nutrition, exhaustion is to know what it means to feel truly alive.
Some of the seal I will eat.
Some I will burn for fuel.
And the rest I will use...

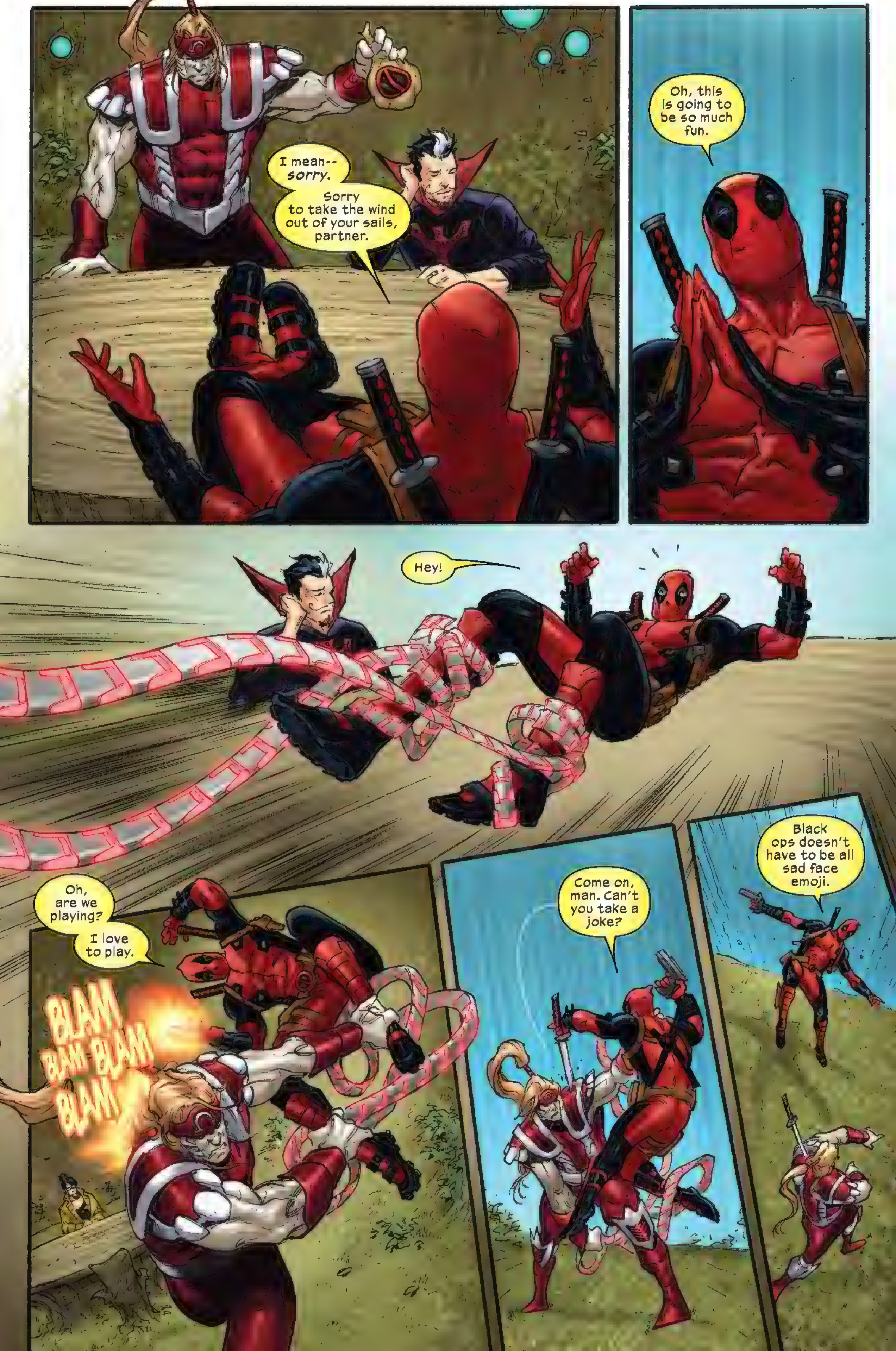

...for bait.
Because I did not come here, to the most *unforgiving environment on Earth,* to hunt a mere seal.
SNIFF SNIFF
I came here to hunt this apex predator...
...the ice bear...
...to prove that I, *Kraven,* am its superior.

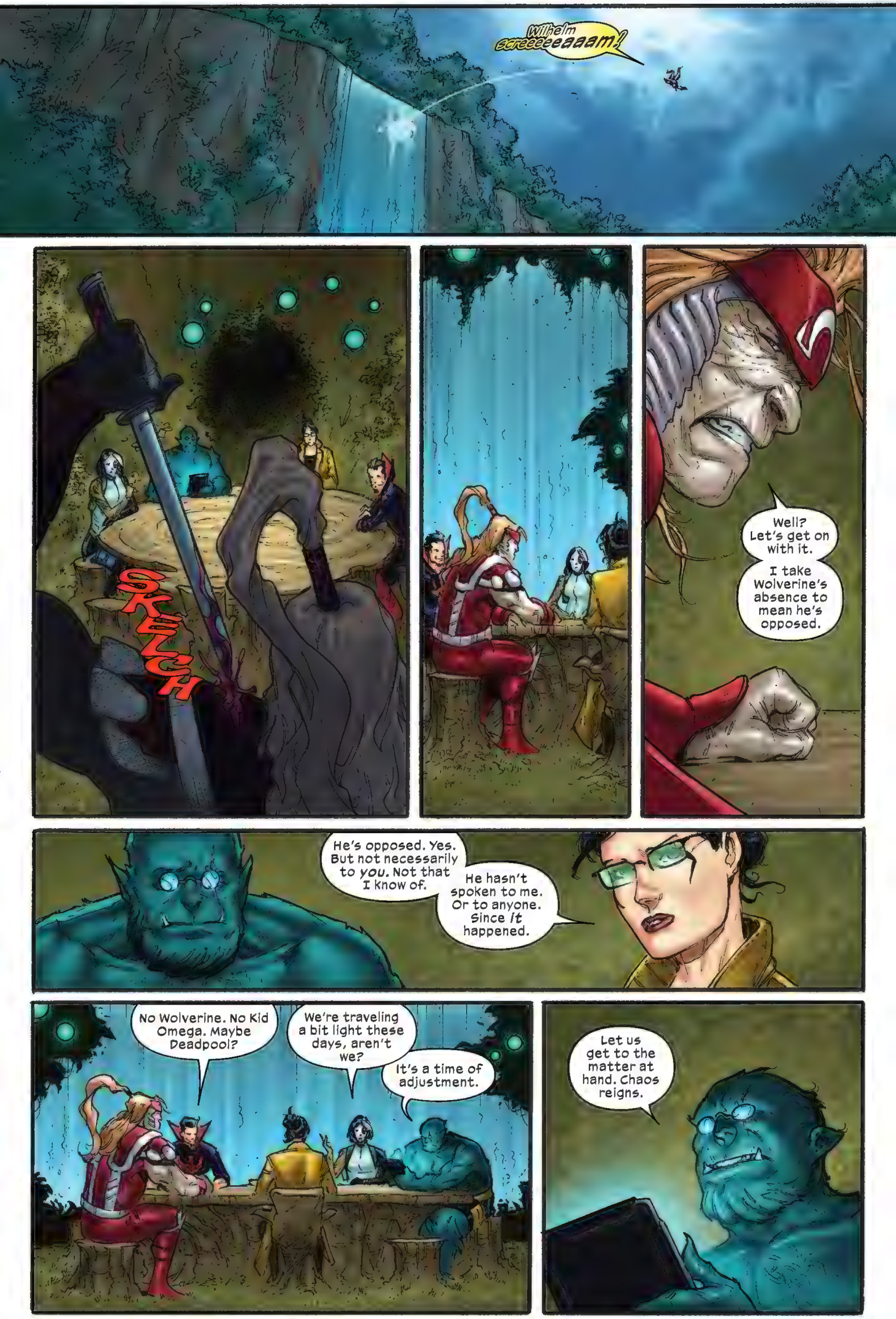

Yes, another animal would attempt to kill me.
But the ice bear will actively stalk me.
I respect and defy this.
I never use a gun, because that distances the killing.
A hunt isn't earned if you can't smell the meaty breath of the thing that wants to savage you.


By that same token, I will skin the animal and wear its furs like a second skin. For survival and for pleasure. The greatest intimacy.
And I will place the severed head of the bear over my own to know what it feels like to look through its jaws from the other side.
Then I will butcher and eat what I kill. A kind of communion.
When I take a thing apart, I know intimately its weakness and its power.
But even as my body shivers with the pleasure of the kill, a part of me feels empty, saddened.
Because what other prize could match the challenge of an alpha like this ice bear?
What have we here?


Krakoa.
Did you know that X-Force wouldn't exist without me?
Did you know Wolverine begged me to join?
It was flattering, but honestly? It was kind of embarrassing too. He was on his knees. There were tears in his eyes.
Between the healing factor, my history in black ops, my weapons skills and my devastating wit and shining intelligence, I'm really the best possible thing to happen to Krakoa.
Wade...
I know, right? Impressive.
You can loudmouth your way around the island all you want.
But don't test your luck with this team.
Let's go. It's time.


No Wolverine, eh?
I wouldn't expect him.
What about... the other one?
He'll be here.
Are you sure?
Pretty sure.
Thanks for finally showing up, O-Red.
Did you forget to adjust your clock? Still living on Moscow time?
FFFFT
Ha! Yes!


I mean-- *sorry.*
Sorry to take the wind out of your sails, partner.
Oh, this is going to be so much fun.
Hey!
Oh, are we playing?
I love to play.
BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM
Come on, man. Can't you take a joke?
Black ops doesn't have to be all sad face emoji.


Wilhelm screeeeeeaaam!
SKELCH
Well? Let's get on with it.
I take Wolverine's absence to mean he's opposed.
He's opposed. Yes. But not necessarily to *you*. Not that I know of.
He hasn't spoken to me. Or to anyone. Since *it* happened.
No Wolverine. No Kid Omega. Maybe Deadpool?
We're traveling a bit light these days, aren't we?
It's a time of adjustment.
Let us get to the matter at hand. Chaos reigns.

BEAST'S LOGBOOK: THE PEASANT'S REVOLT

There comes a time in every human life when there is more past than future. Typically, this is accompanied by a crisis. A fast, overpriced, cherry red car. An extramarital affair. A plastic surgery that makes them appear, well, plastic. Humans desperately worship youth. Nothing puts more panic in their hearts than a gray hair, a liver spot, any marker of the inescapable reality: Everything must die.

Except us. Except mutants.

I am quite honestly surprised we have been able to keep resurrection a secret this long. But now the world knows. And whatever hate was directed toward us in the time before Krakoa -- I believe it has multiplied tenfold.

The gates are impossible right now, a veritable mosh pit of protesters and beggars stands before each one.

Scientists decry us as playing God. Politicians demand the technology be made available to them or they will renege on the treaty that recognized Krakoa as a sovereign nation (in exchange for our medicines).

That's one of the reasons Deadpool is among us now. He might be a fool, but he's a deadly one. And we need as many blades and bullets on our side as possible in this time of revolt.

To put it simply, but truly: Things are bad. And they're in all likelihood about to get worse.

Our response cannot merely be defensive (though that will be the job of one crew -- consisting of Black Tom and Domino -- that I'm sending to break up particularly problematic gatherings at our gates).

The winning strategy is always offensive.

Thrust over parry.

SAGE'S LOGBOOK: NORTHERN EXPOSURE

There is an expression used among advertising strategists: Change the conversation.

If a brand is sullied by controversy (a salmonella outbreak, a disgraced executive, etc.), then you dodge a public trial by focusing the attention elsewhere.

You launch a new product. You sign a new spokesman. You go to war with a competitor.

We hope, as a nation, to change the conversation from the topic of resurrection.

I have run several predictive algorithms and determined this is the best course of action:

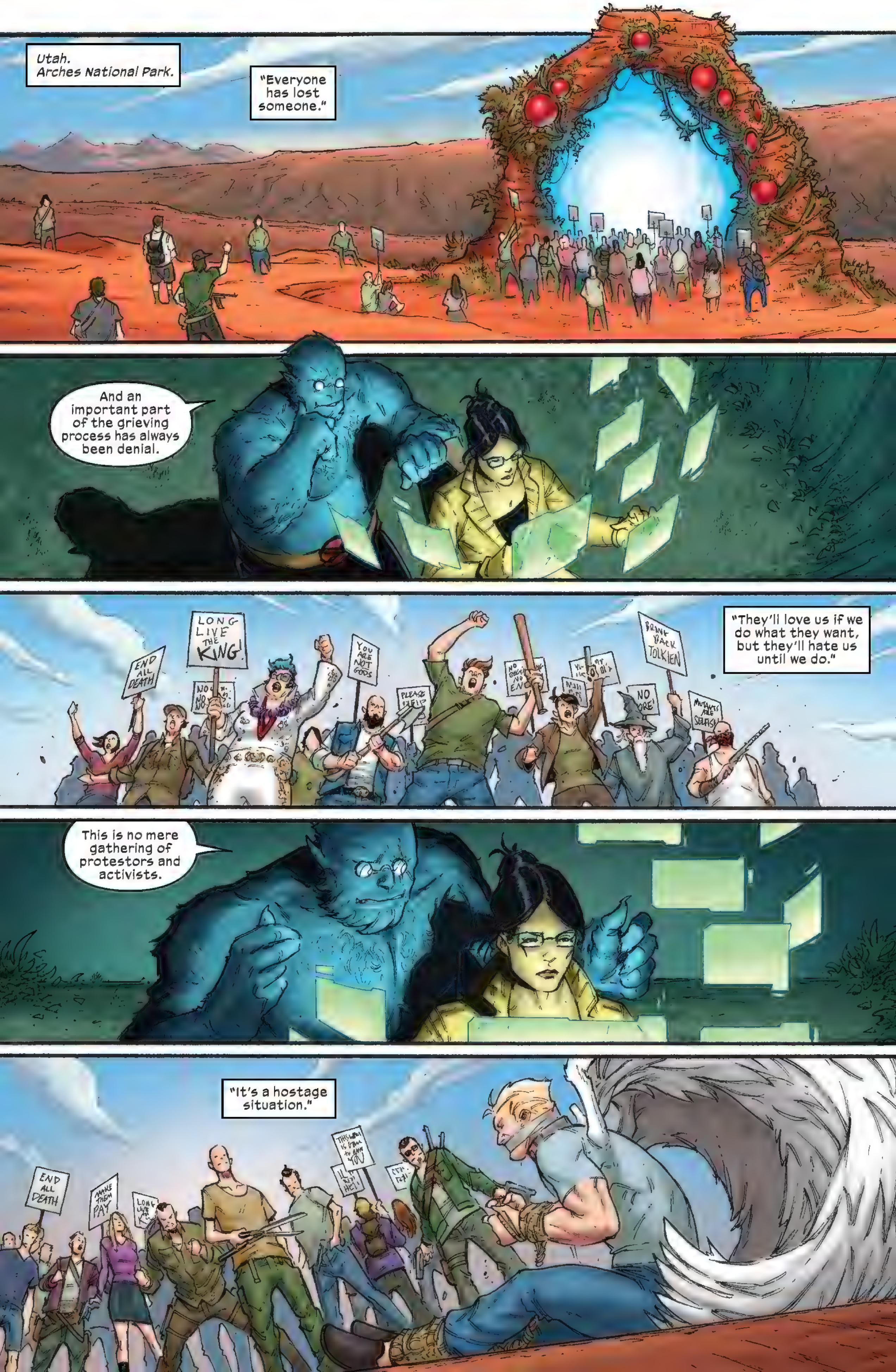
Due to rising temperatures, the arctic ice is melting and northern waterways have opened up north of Russia.

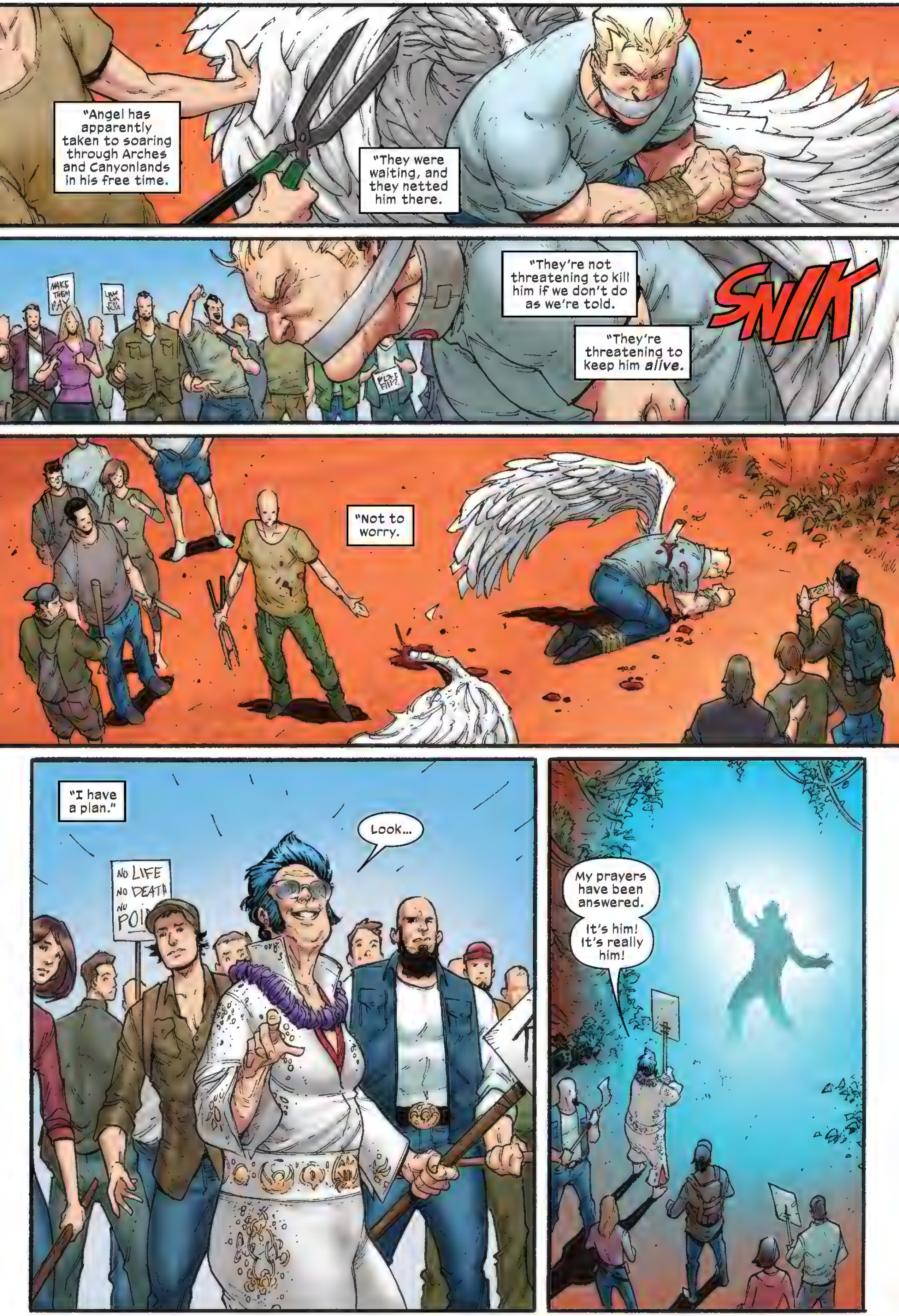
Deep web research has revealed this as a fresh artery for mutant trafficking.

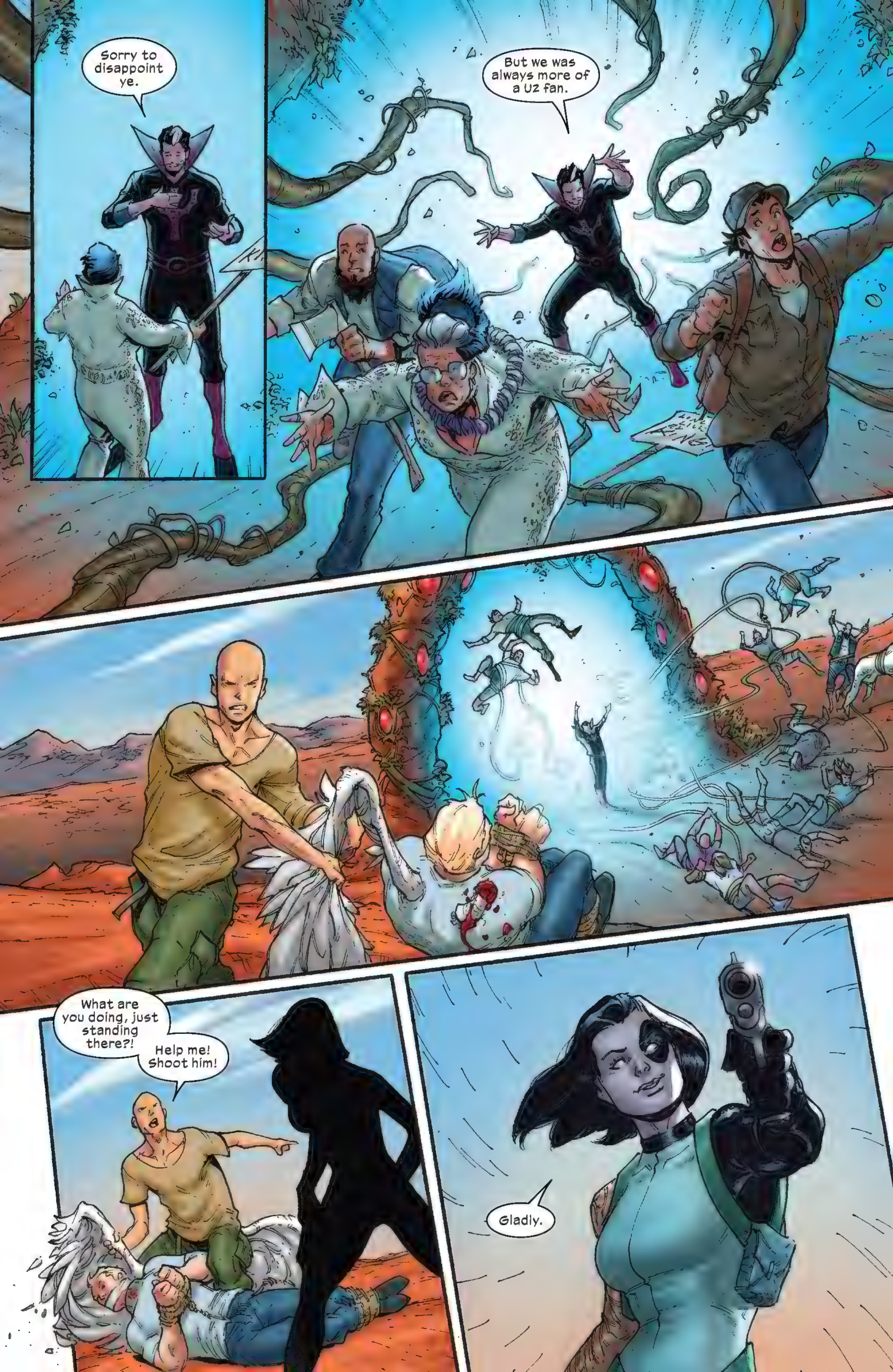
An X-Force strike team -- consisting of Deadpool and Omega Red -- will travel there now. Not only to interrupt a shipment, but to deliver the trafficked mutants to a press contingent we have arranged.

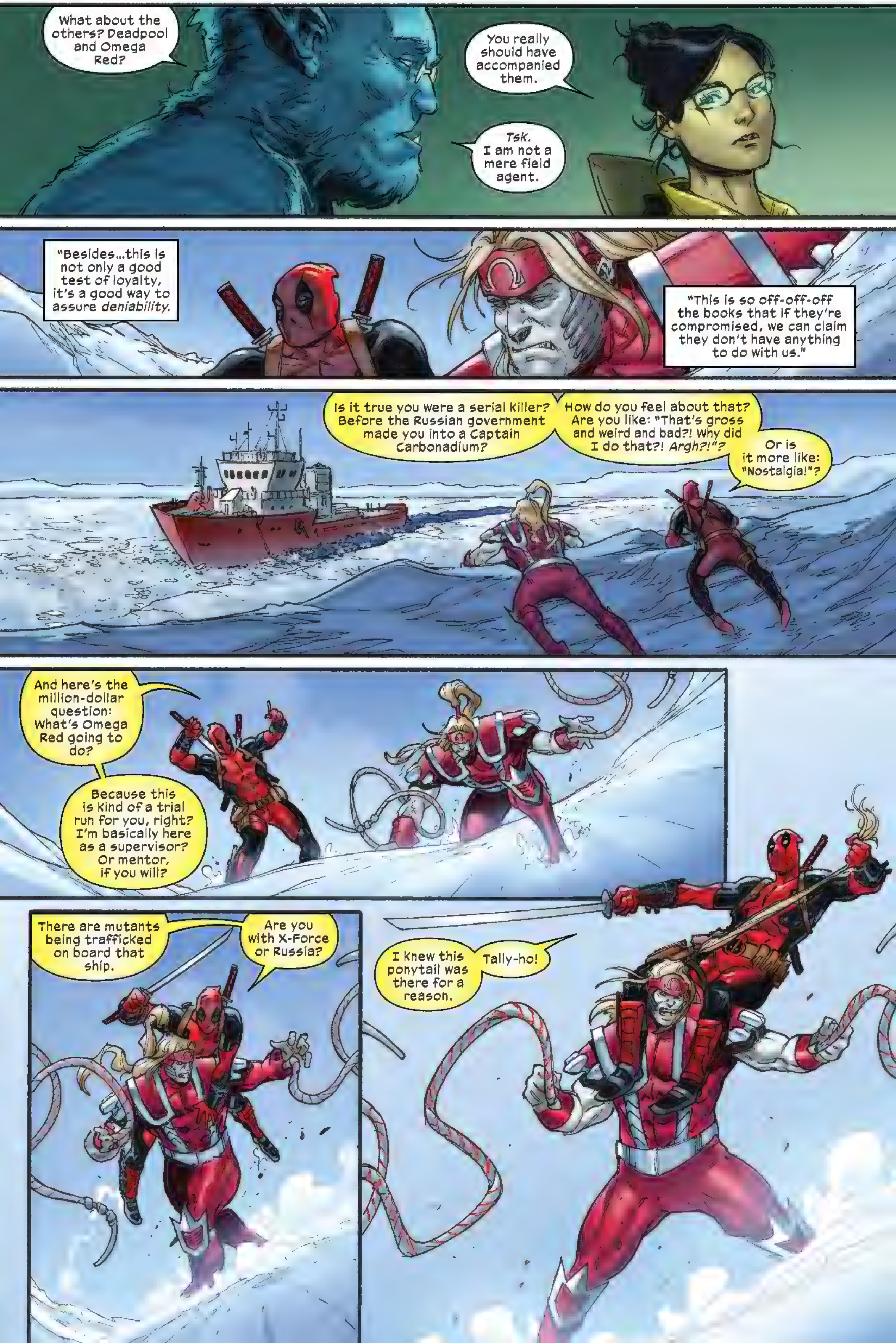
An act of heroism on our part, an act of villainy elsewhere. We burnish our image, we tarnish another.

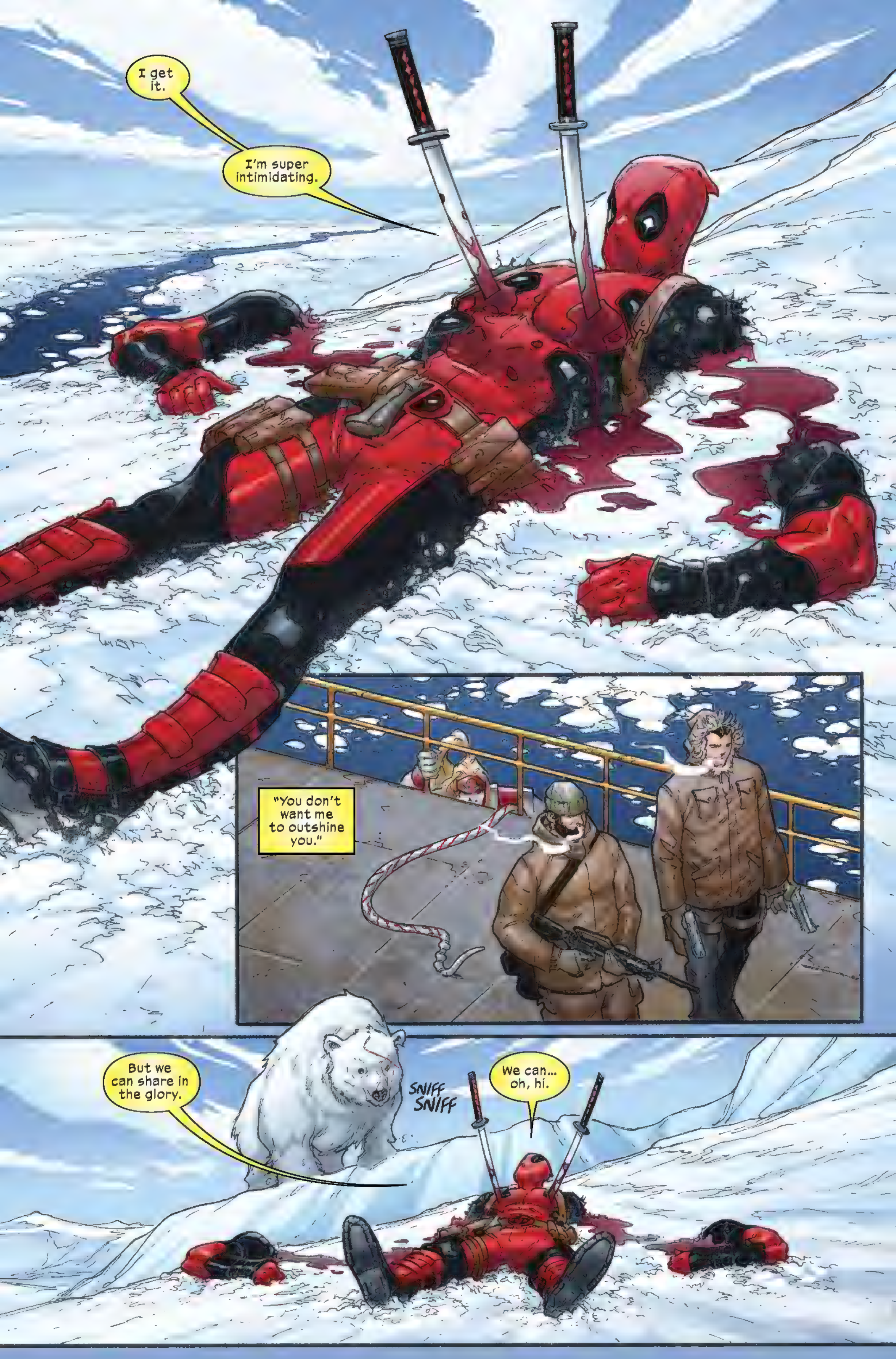
(Note: Both Deadpool and Omega Red are considered exploratory members of X-Force; their success or failure on this mission may determine their future with the team.)

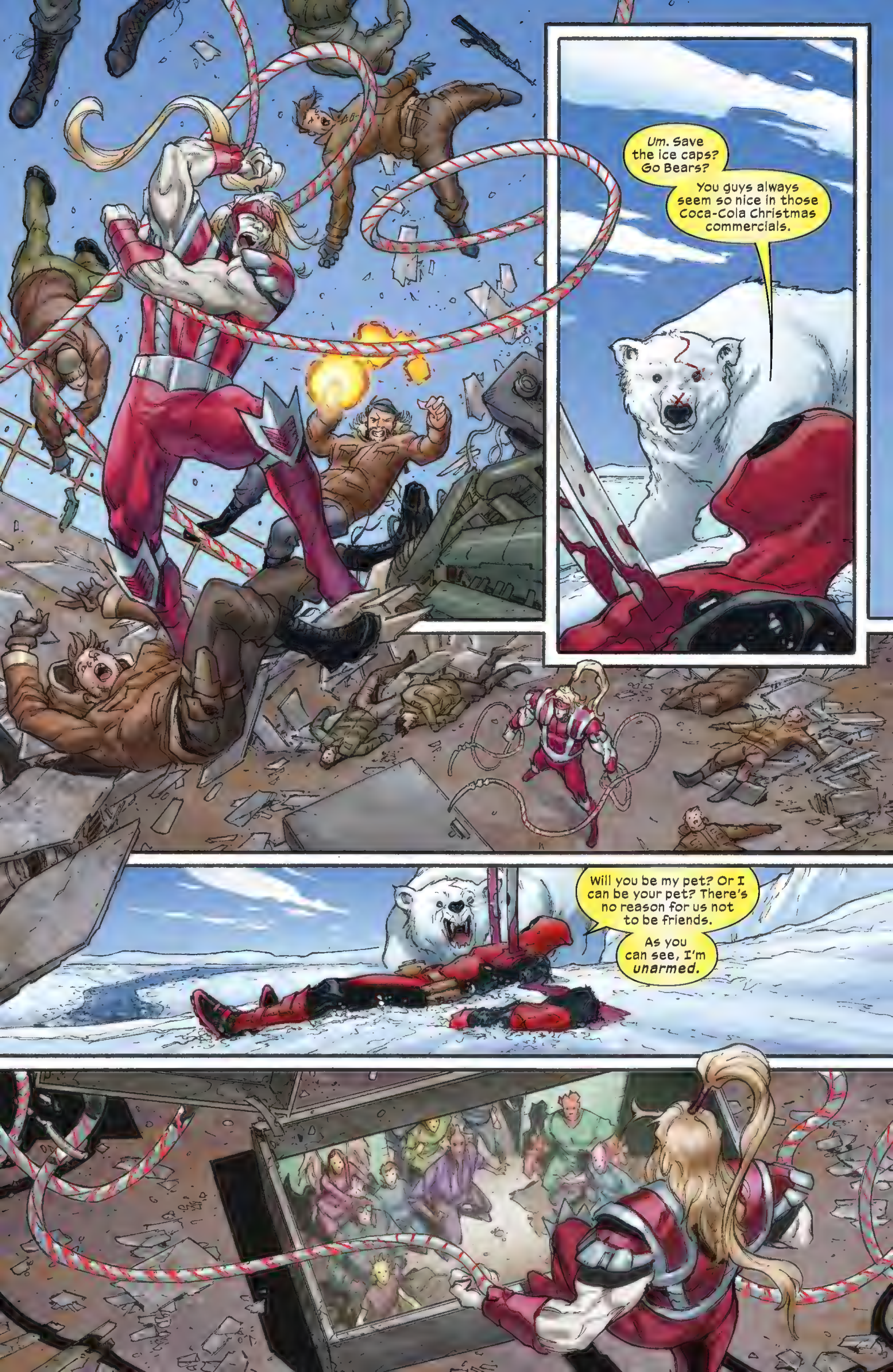

Utah.
Arches National Park.
"Everyone has lost someone."
And an important part of the grieving process has always been denial.
END ALL DEATH
LONG LIVE THE KING!
YOU ARE NOT GODS
PLEASE HELP
NO MORE!
BRING BACK TOLKIEN
MUTANTS ARE SELFISH
"They'll love us if we do what they want, but they'll hate us until we do."
This is no mere gathering of protestors and activists.
"It's a hostage situation."
END ALL DEATH
MAKE THEM PAY


"Angel has apparently taken to soaring through Arches and Canyonlands in his free time.
"They were waiting, and they netted him there.
MAKE THEM PAY
"They're not threatening to kill him if we don't do as we're told.
"They're threatening to keep him *alive*.
SNIK
"Not to worry.
"I have a plan."
Look...
NO LIFE NO DEATH NO POI
My prayers have been answered.
It's him! It's really him!

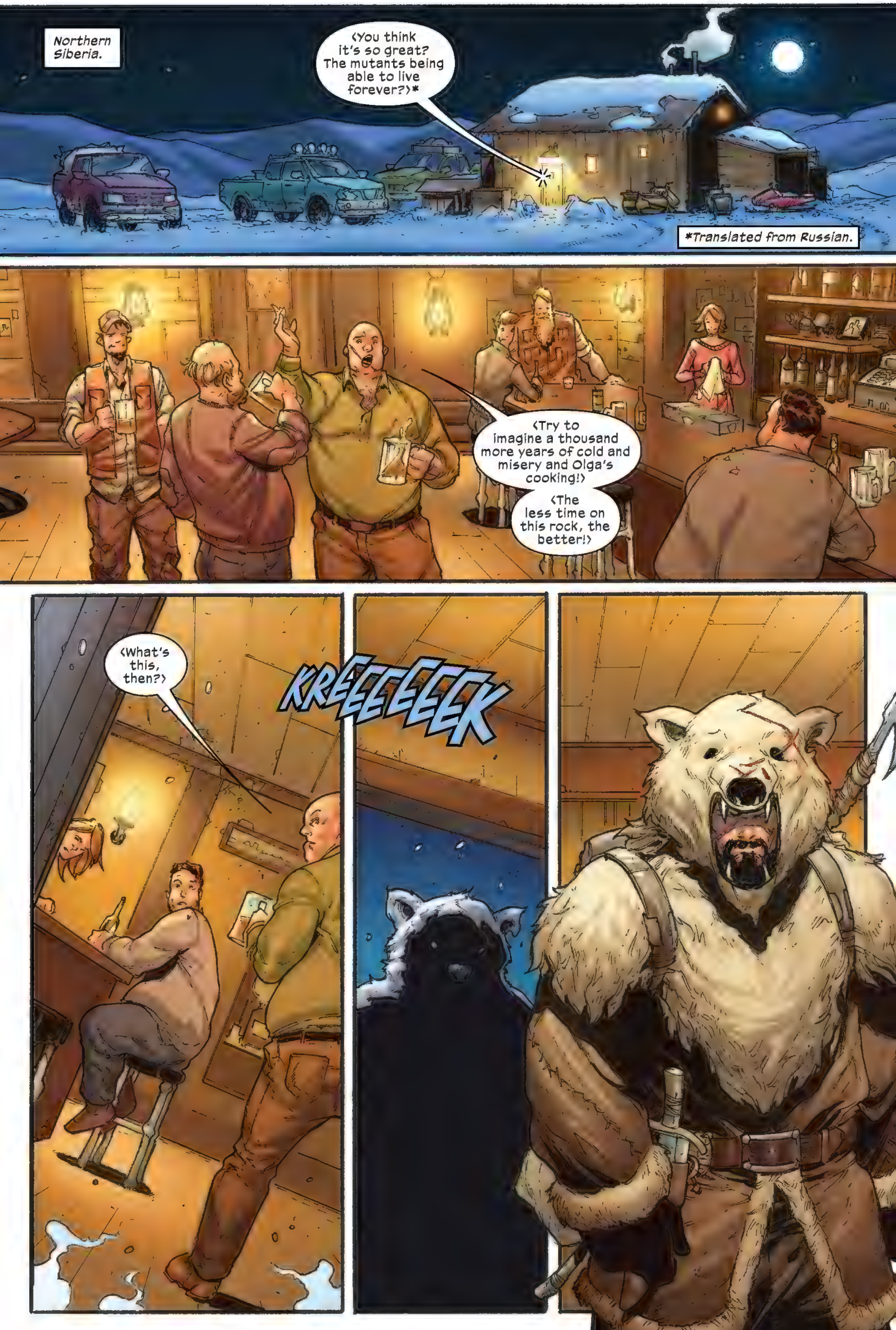

Sorry to disappoint ye.
But we was always more of a U2 fan.
What are you doing, just standing there?!
Help me! Shoot him!
Gladly.

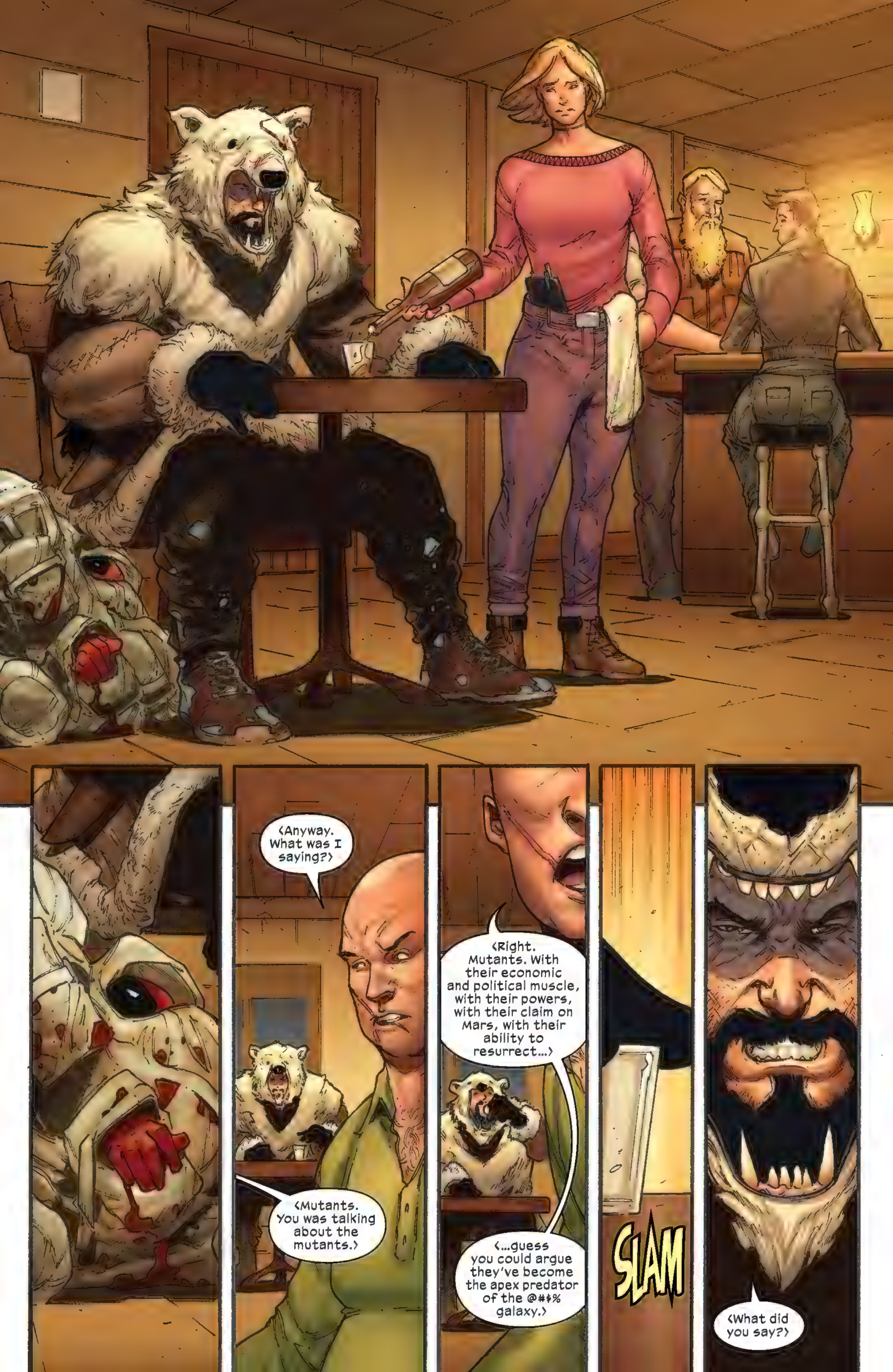

What about the others? Deadpool and Omega Red?
You really should have accompanied them.
Tsk. I am not a mere field agent.
"Besides...this is not only a good test of loyalty, it's a good way to assure *deniability.*
"This is so off-off-off the books that if they're compromised, we can claim they don't have anything to do with us."
Is it true you were a serial killer? Before the Russian government made you into a Captain Carbonadium?
How do you feel about that? Are you like: "That's gross and weird and bad?! Why did I do that?! *Argh?!*"?
Or is it more like: "Nostalgia!"?
And here's the million-dollar question: What's Omega Red going to do?
Because this is kind of a trial run for you, right? I'm basically here as a supervisor? Or mentor, if you will?
There are mutants being trafficked on board that ship.
Are you with X-Force or Russia?
I knew this ponytail was there for a reason.
Tally-ho!


I get it.
I'm super intimidating.
"You don't want me to outshine you."
But we can share in the glory.
SNIFF SNIFF
We can... oh, hi.



Um. Save the ice caps? Go Bears?
You guys always seem so nice in those Coca-Cola Christmas commercials.
Will you be my pet? Or I can be your pet? There's no reason for us not to be friends.
As you can see, I'm *unarmed*.


Northern Siberia.
‹You think it's so great? The mutants being able to live forever?›*
*Translated from Russian.
‹Try to imagine a thousand more years of cold and misery and Olga's cooking!›
‹The less time on this rock, the better!›
‹What's this, then?›
KREEEEEEEK


‹Anyway. What was I saying?›
‹Mutants. You was talking about the mutants.›
‹Right. Mutants. With their economic and political muscle, with their powers, with their claim on Mars, with their ability to resurrect...›
‹...guess you could argue they've become the apex predator of the @#$% galaxy.›
SLAM
‹What did you say?›

The Hunt for X Part 2: Anatomy of a Killer

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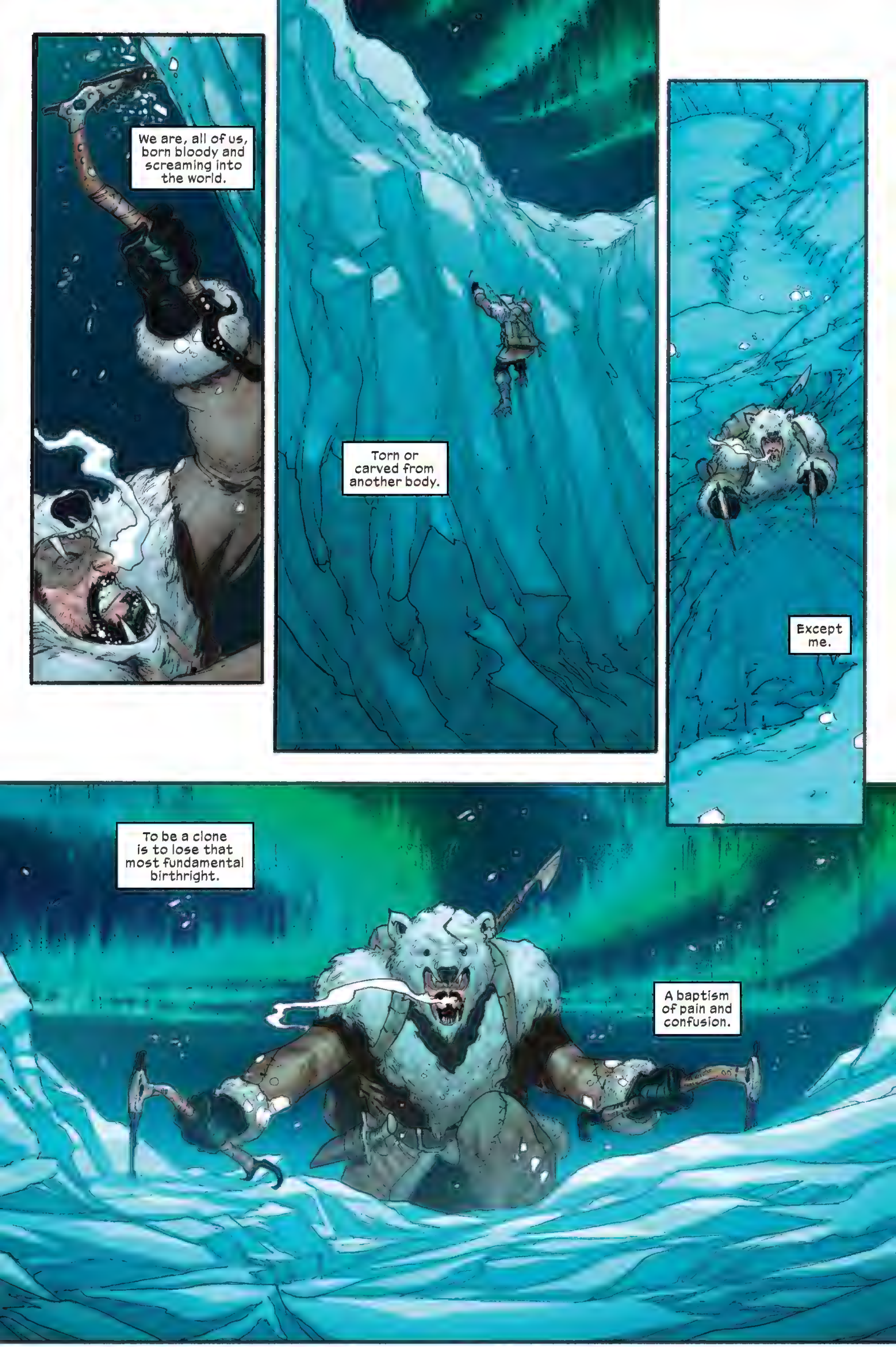
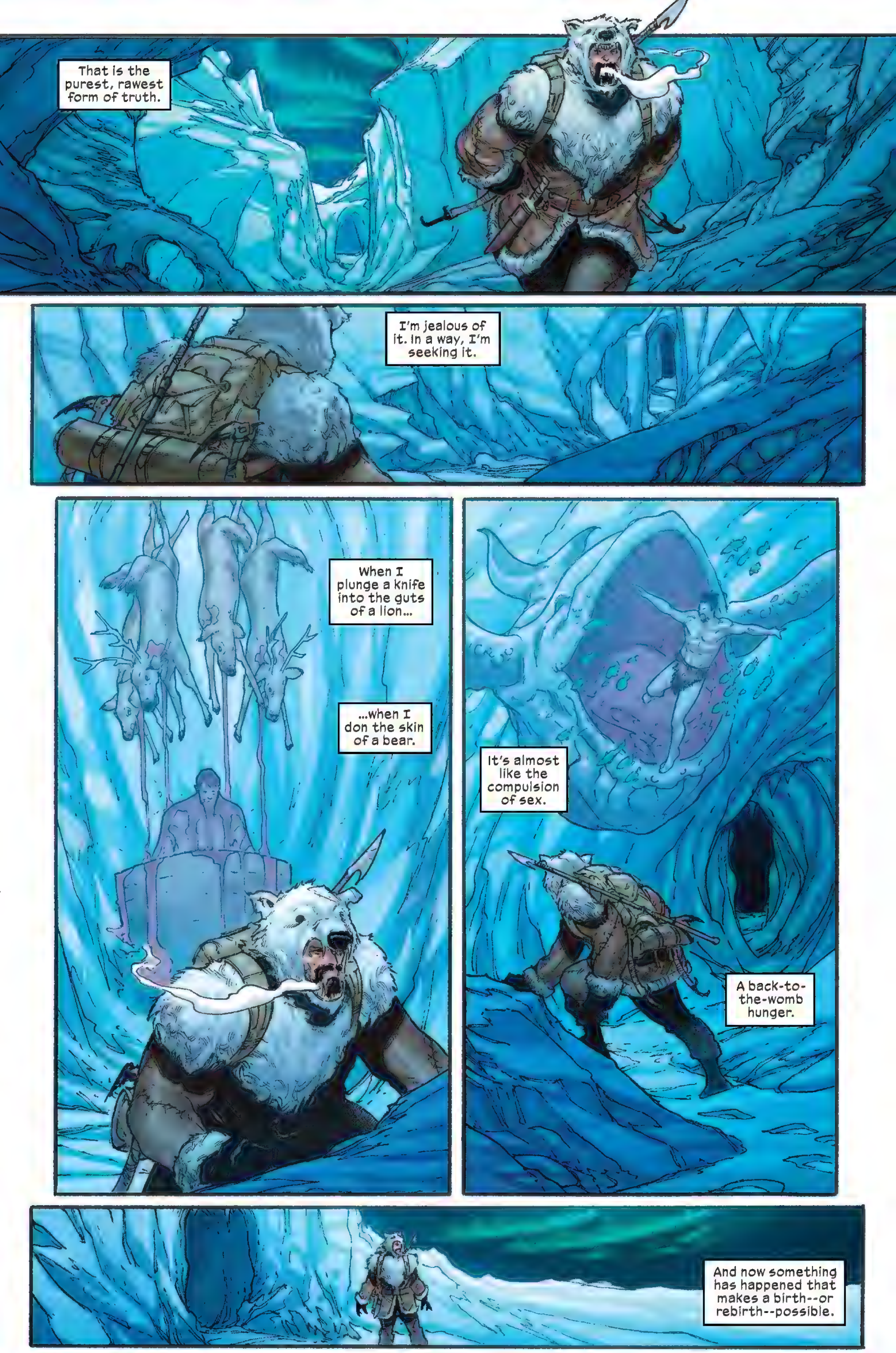
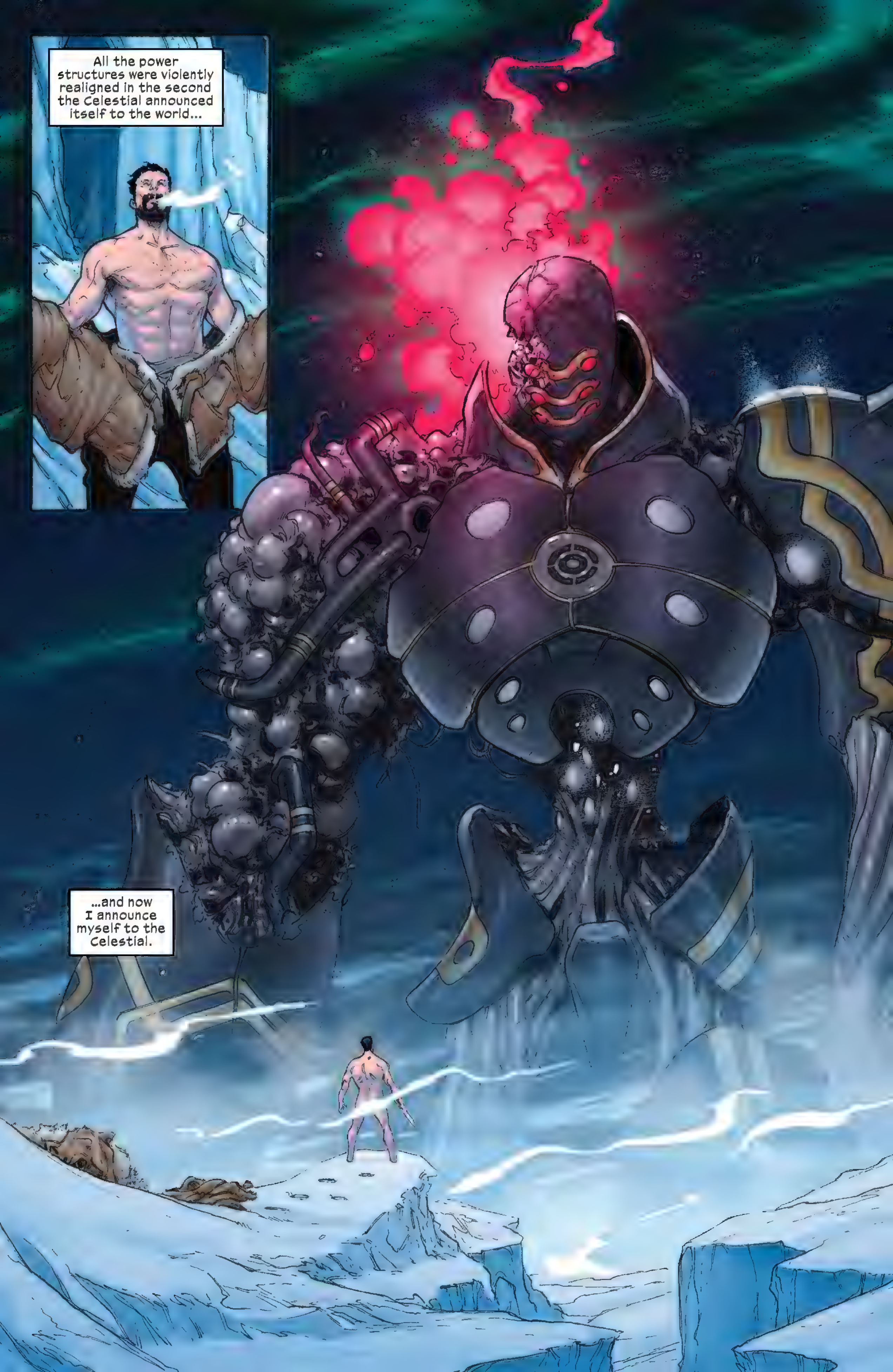
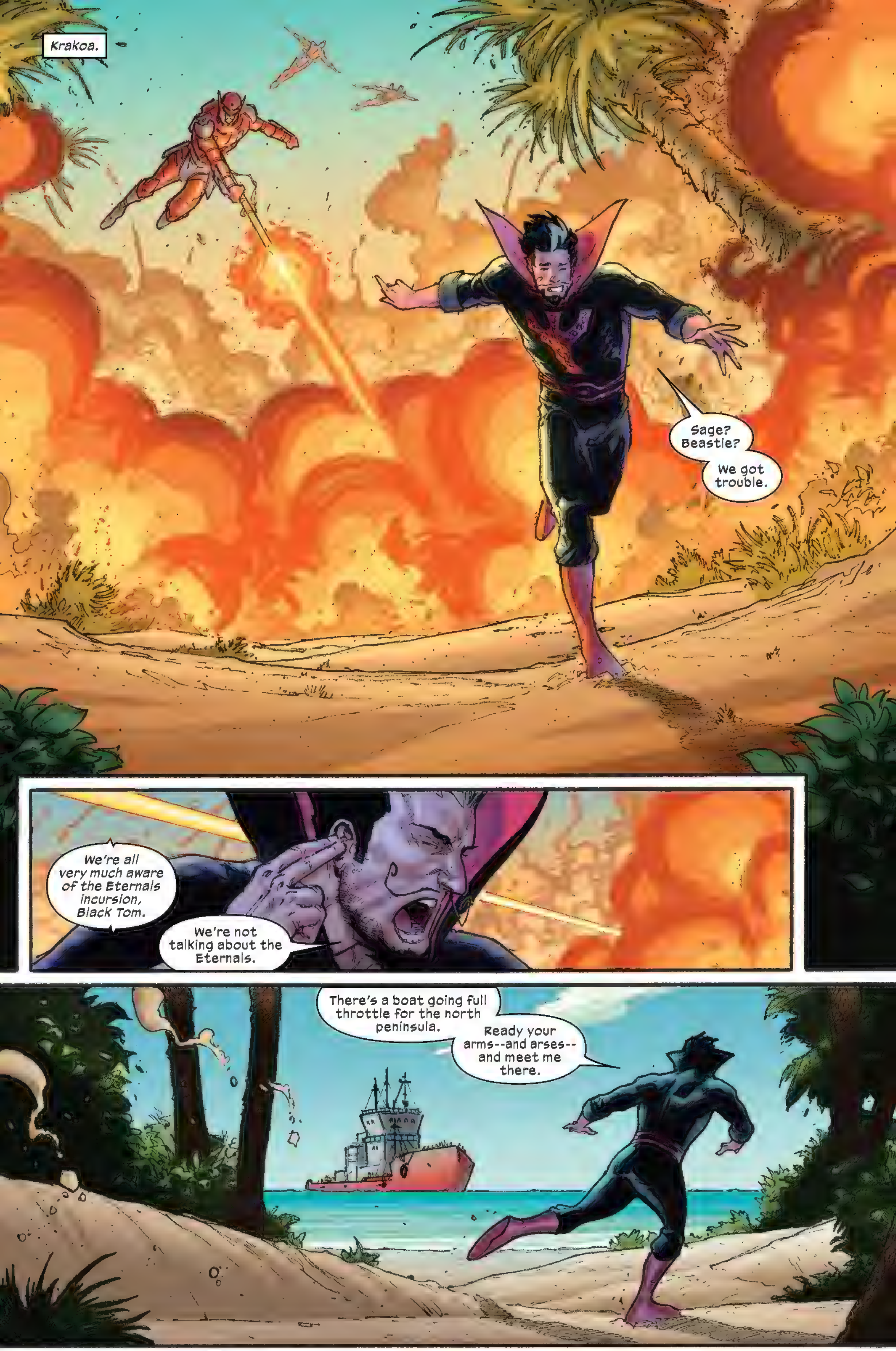
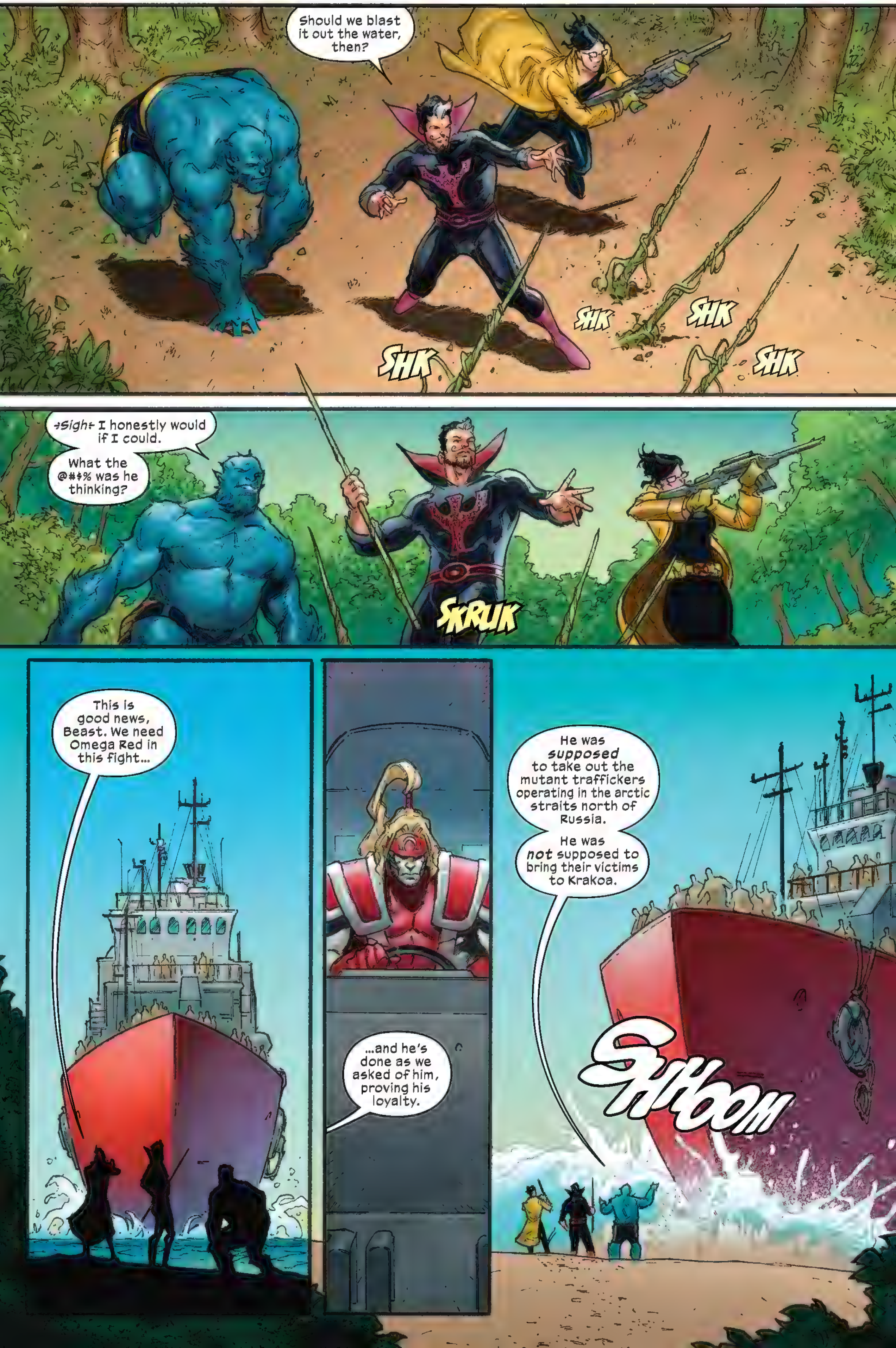
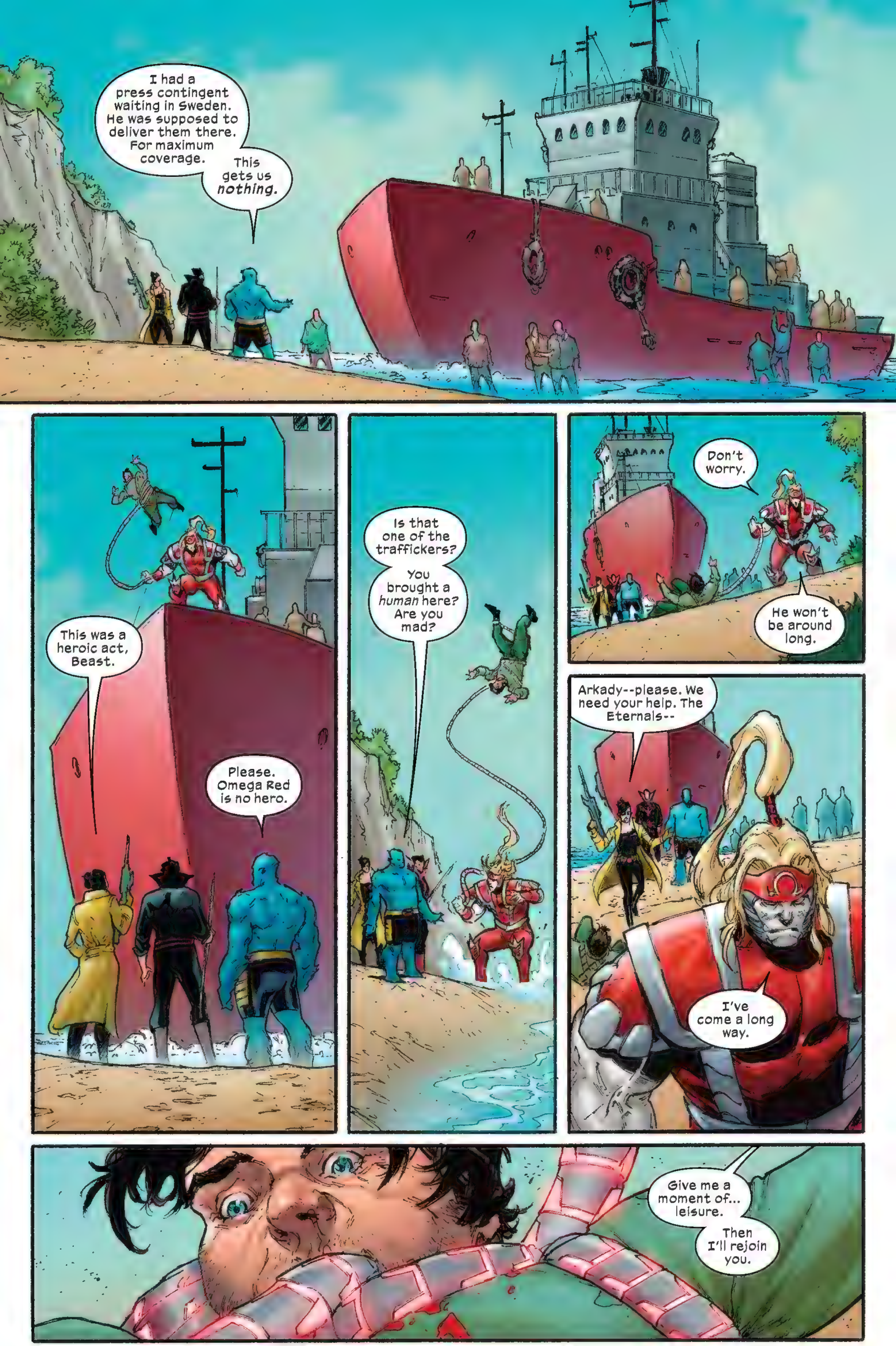

We are, all of us, born bloody and screaming into the world.
Torn or carved from another body.
Except me.
To be a clone is to lose that most fundamental birthright.
A baptism of pain and confusion.


That is the purest, rawest form of truth.
I'm jealous of it. In a way, I'm seeking it.
When I plunge a knife into the guts of a lion...
...when I don the skin of a bear.
It's almost like the compulsion of sex.
A back-to-the-womb hunger.
And now something has happened that makes a birth--or rebirth--possible.


All the power structures were violently realigned in the second the Celestial announced itself to the world...
...and now I announce myself to the Celestial.


Krakoa.
Sage? Beastie?
We got trouble.
We're all very much aware of the Eternals incursion, Black Tom.
We're not talking about the Eternals.
There's a boat going full throttle for the north peninsula.
Ready your arms--and arses--and meet me there.


Should we blast it out the water, then?
SHK
SHK
SHK
SHK
-Sigh- I honestly would if I could.
What the @#$% was he thinking?
SKRUK
This is good news, Beast. We need Omega Red in this fight...
...and he's done as we asked of him, proving his loyalty.
He was *supposed* to take out the mutant traffickers operating in the arctic straits north of Russia.
He was *not* supposed to bring their victims to Krakoa.
SHHOOM


I had a press contingent waiting in Sweden. He was supposed to deliver them there. For maximum coverage.
This gets us *nothing*.
This was a heroic act, Beast.
Please. Omega Red is no hero.
Is that one of the traffickers?
You brought a *human* here? Are you mad?
Don't worry.
He won't be around long.
Arkady--please. We need your help. The Eternals--
I've come a long way.
Give me a moment of... leisure.
Then I'll rejoin you.

BEAST'S LOGBOOK: PERFORMANCE REVIEW: OMEGA RED

Omega Red (Arkady Grigorievich Rossovich)

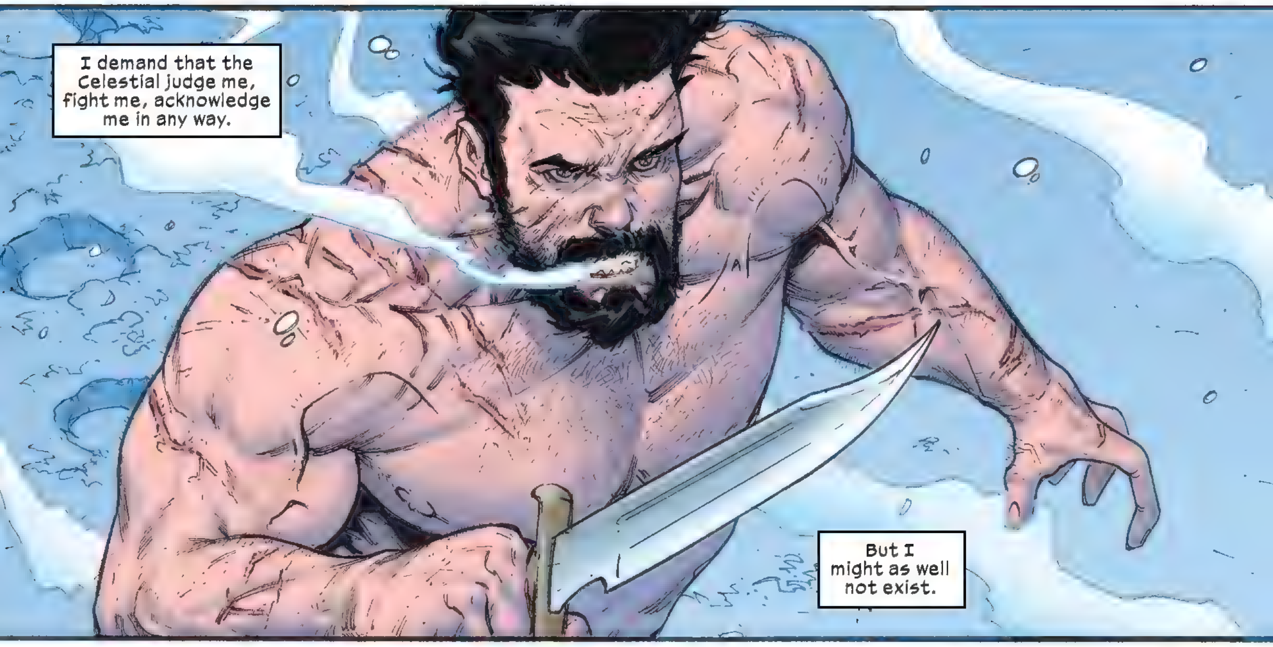
Mission:
: Omega Red -- accompanied by Deadpool -- was recently sent to an Arctic waterway along which Russian mutants were being trafficked. In expectation of a successful assignment, a press contingent was arranged and several reporters were bribed to maximize publicity.

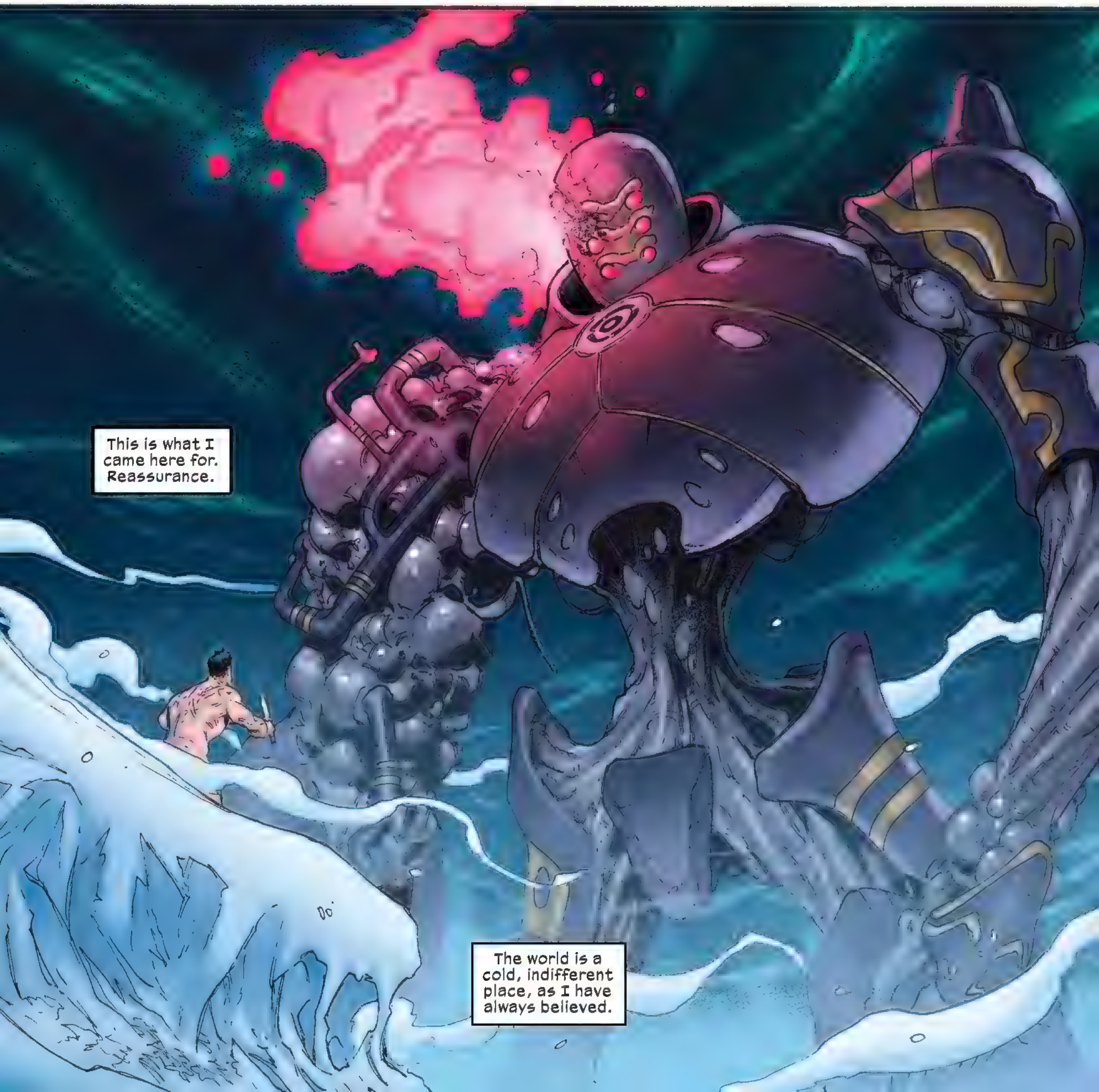
Relevance and Intent:
: This was not a mission of goodwill; it was a mission of distraction. Ever since the secret of mutant resurrection was revealed, Krakoa has trended negatively in media coverage and public polling. By interrupting this trafficking operation -- and by freeing the imprisoned mutants -- we would remind the world of our historic victimization and paint another country as the enemy.

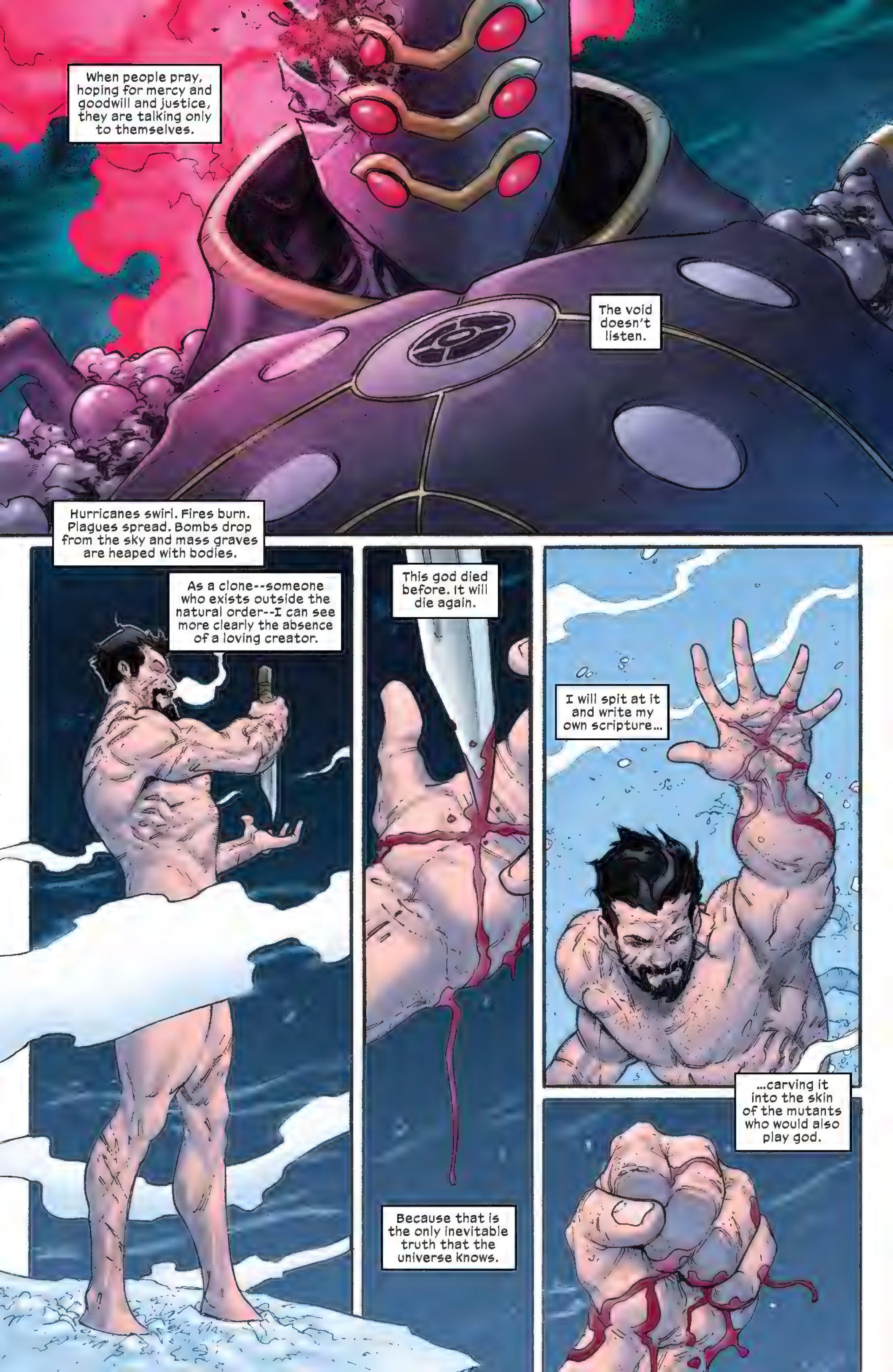
--Black Mark--
Deadpool did not return with Omega Red and no explanation has been given beyond "I'm sure he'll turn up eventually."

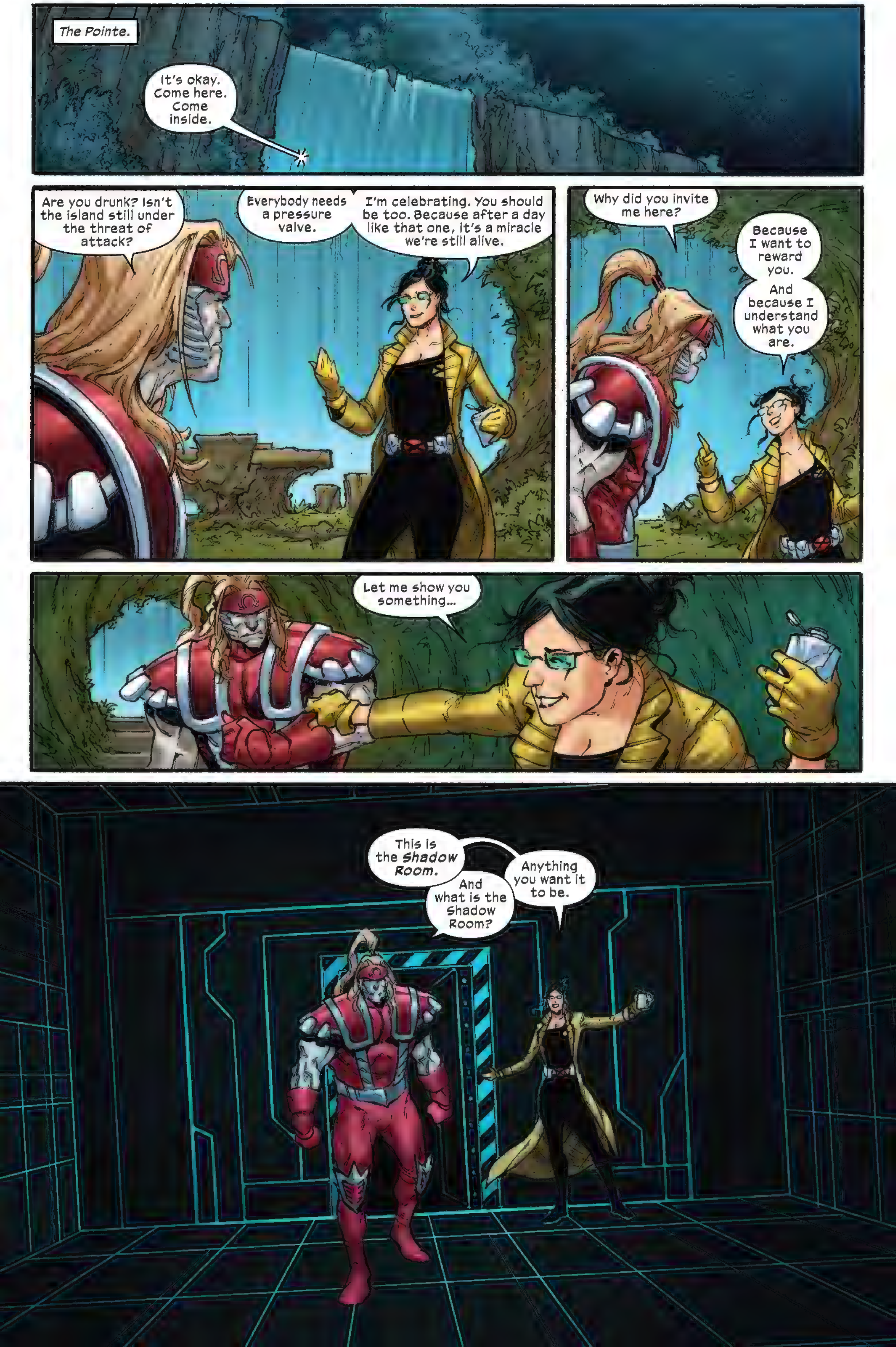
--Black Mark--
Omega Red, without consulting his superiors, bypassed the press and delivered the refugees directly to Krakoa. This undercut the intention of the operation and dirtied our shores with victims and undesirables who will do little to burnish our strength and reputation.

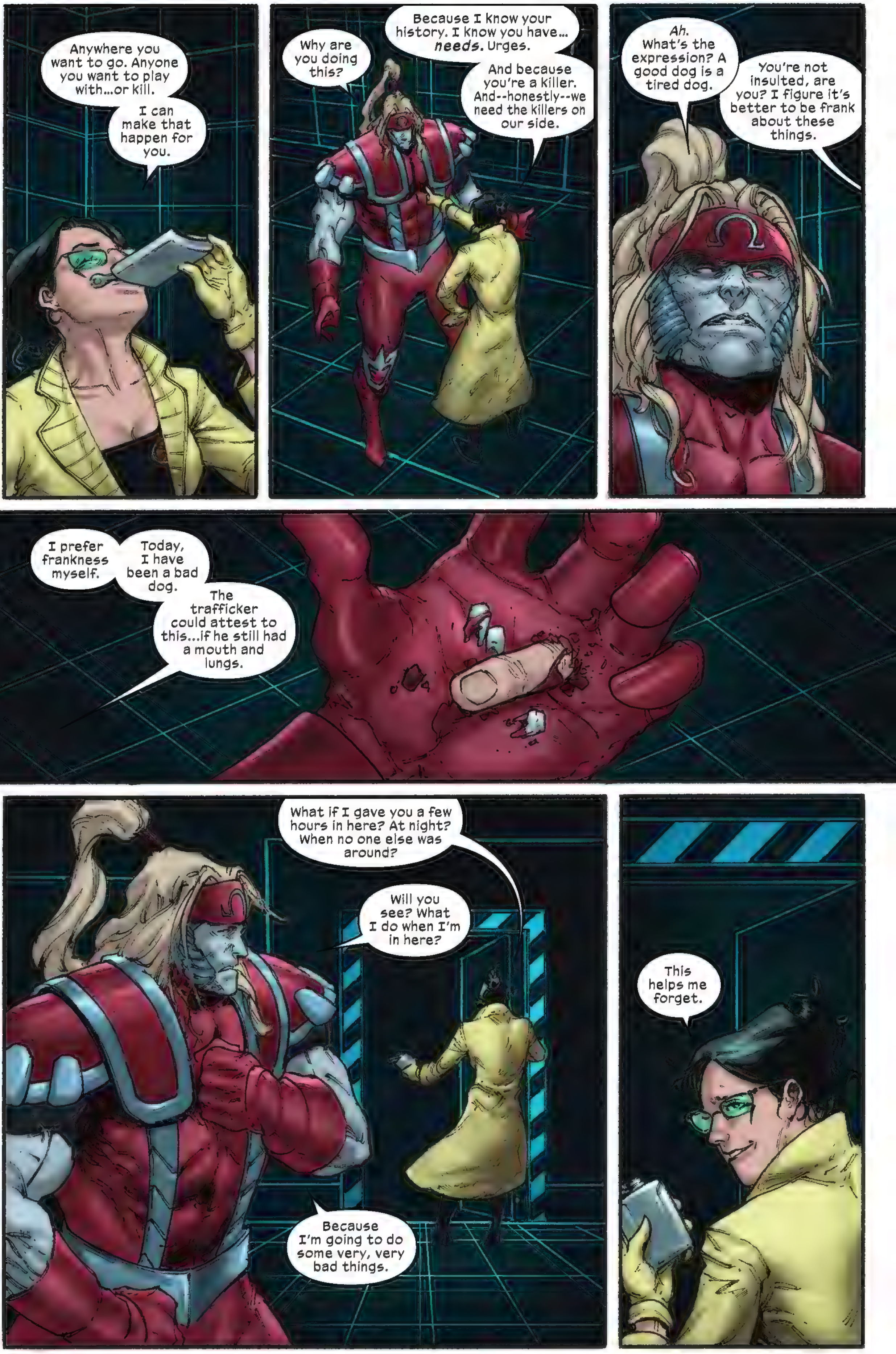
Note: Sometimes I think the only way X-Force might be successfully unified and collaborative is if I cloned myself several times over…

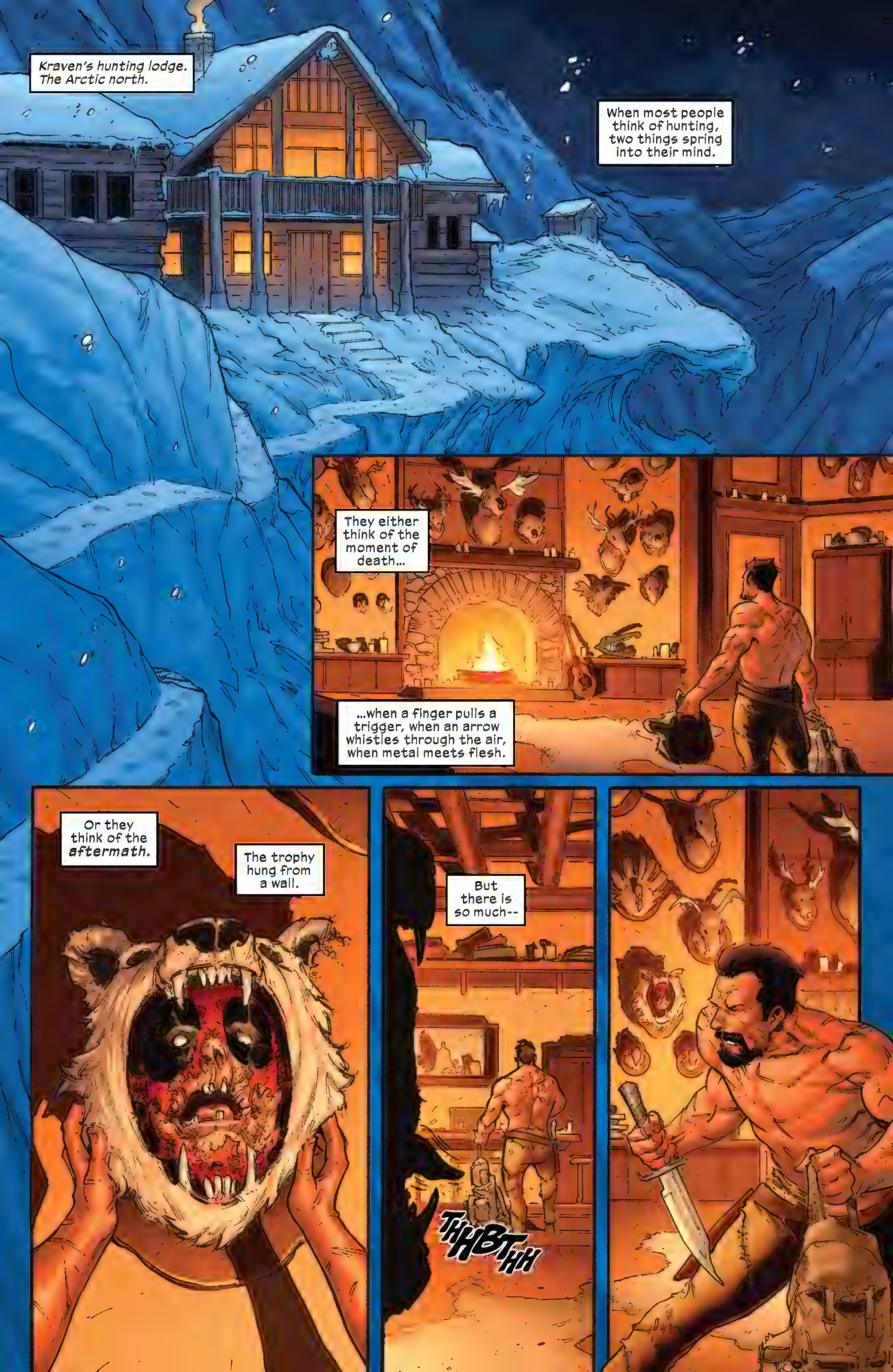

I demand that the Celestial judge me, fight me, acknowledge me in any way.
But I might as well not exist.

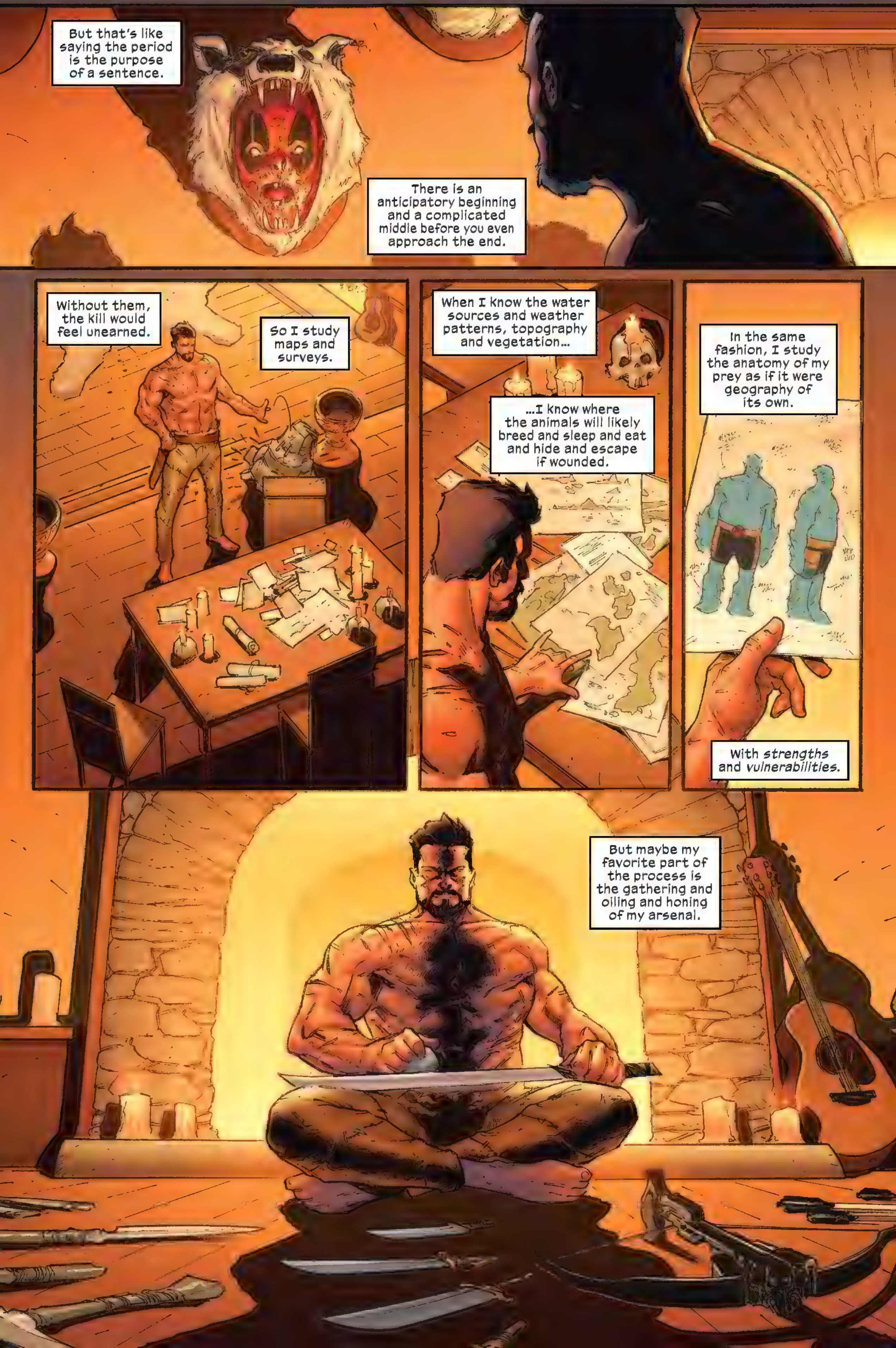

This is what I came here for. Reassurance.
The world is a cold, indifferent place, as I have always believed.

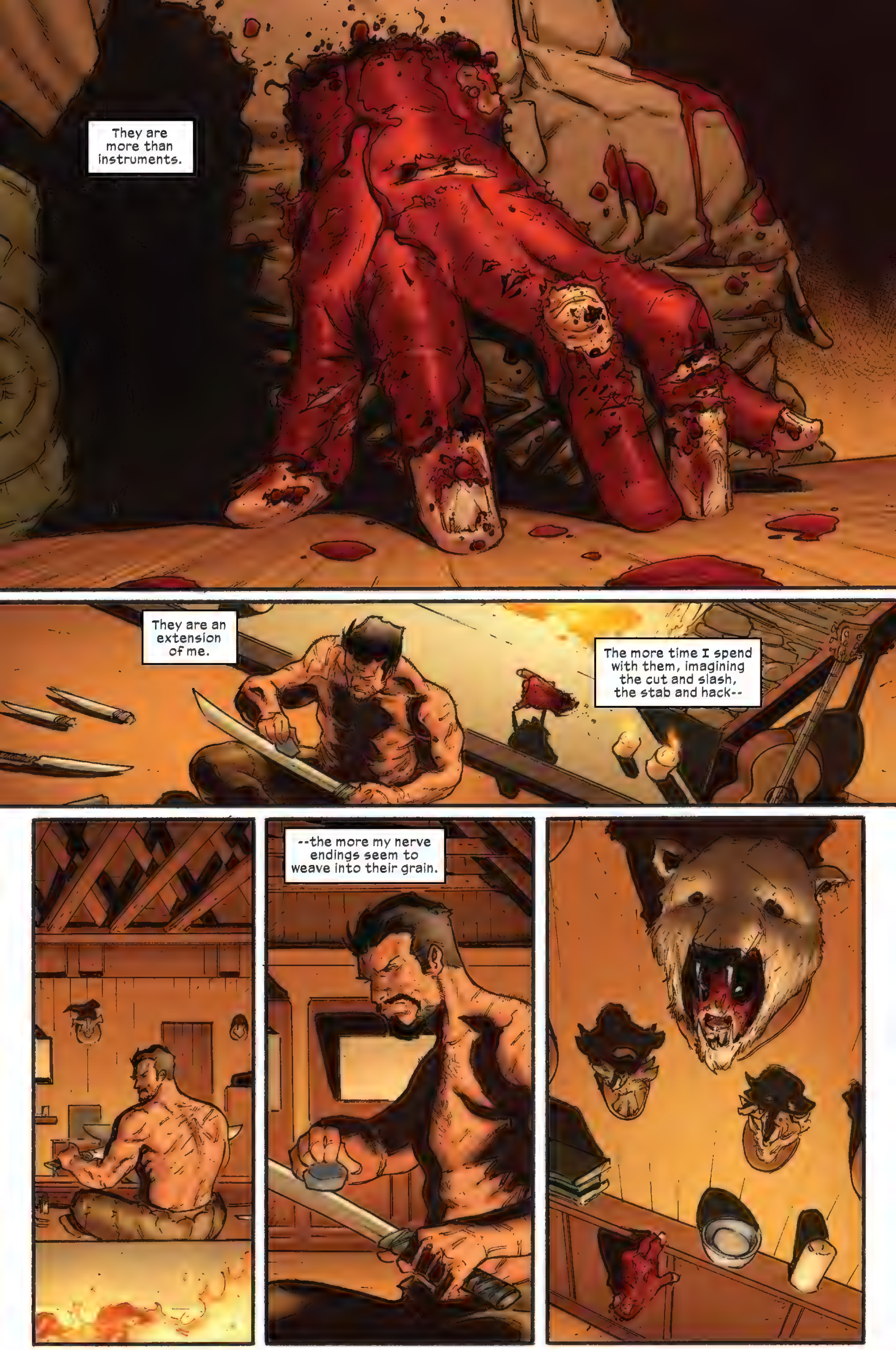

When people pray, hoping for mercy and goodwill and justice, they are talking only to themselves.
The void doesn't listen.
Hurricanes swirl. Fires burn. Plagues spread. Bombs drop from the sky and mass graves are heaped with bodies.
As a clone--someone who exists outside the natural order--I can see more clearly the absence of a loving creator.
This god died before. It will die again.
Because that is the only inevitable truth that the universe knows.
I will spit at it and write my own scripture...
...carving it into the skin of the mutants who would also play god.

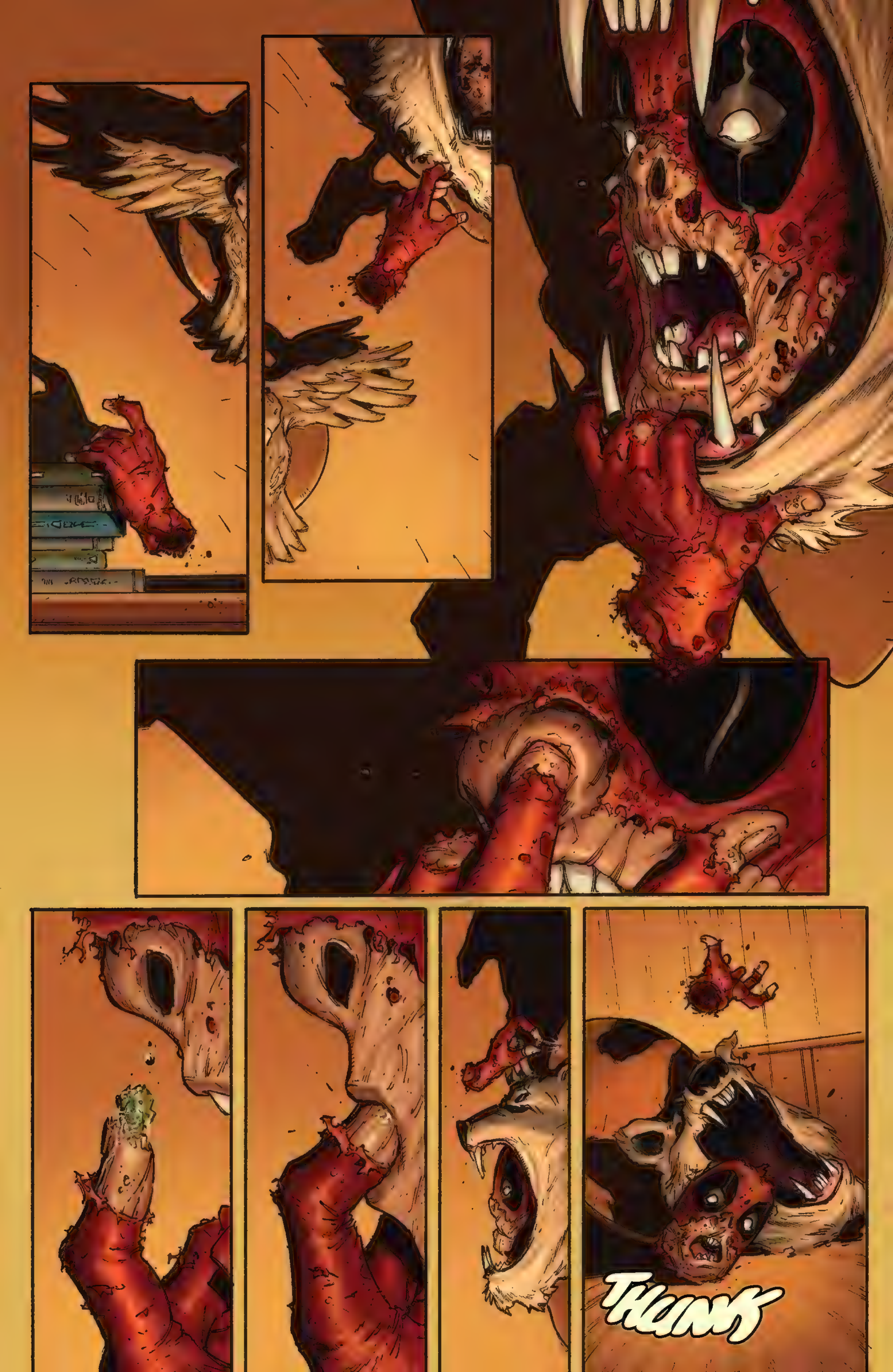

The Pointe.
It's okay. Come here. Come inside.
Are you drunk? Isn't the island still under the threat of attack?
Everybody needs a pressure valve.
I'm celebrating. You should be too. Because after a day like that one, it's a miracle we're still alive.
Why did you invite me here?
Because I want to reward you.
And because I understand what you are.
Let me show you something...
This is the *Shadow Room.*
And what is the Shadow Room?
Anything you want it to be.

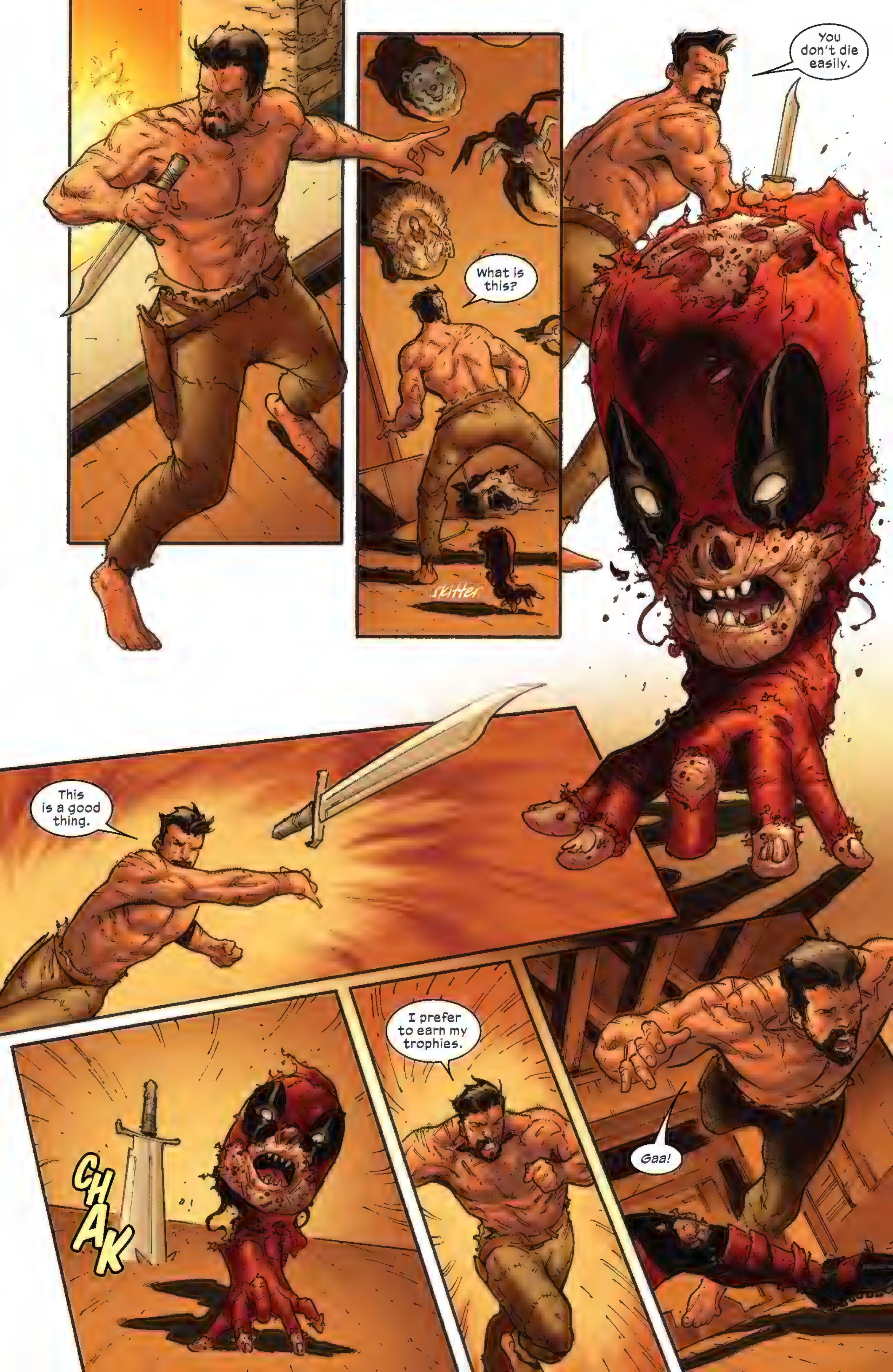

Anywhere you want to go. Anyone you want to play with...or kill.
I can make that happen for you.
Why are you doing this?
Because I know your history. I know you have... *needs.* Urges.
And because you're a killer. And--honestly--we need the killers on our side.
Ah. What's the expression? A good dog is a tired dog.
You're not insulted, are you? I figure it's better to be frank about these things.
I prefer frankness myself.
Today, I have been a bad dog.
The trafficker could attest to this...if he still had a mouth and lungs.
What if I gave you a few hours in here? At night? When no one else was around?
Will you see? What I do when I'm in here?
Because I'm going to do some very, very bad things.
This helps me forget.

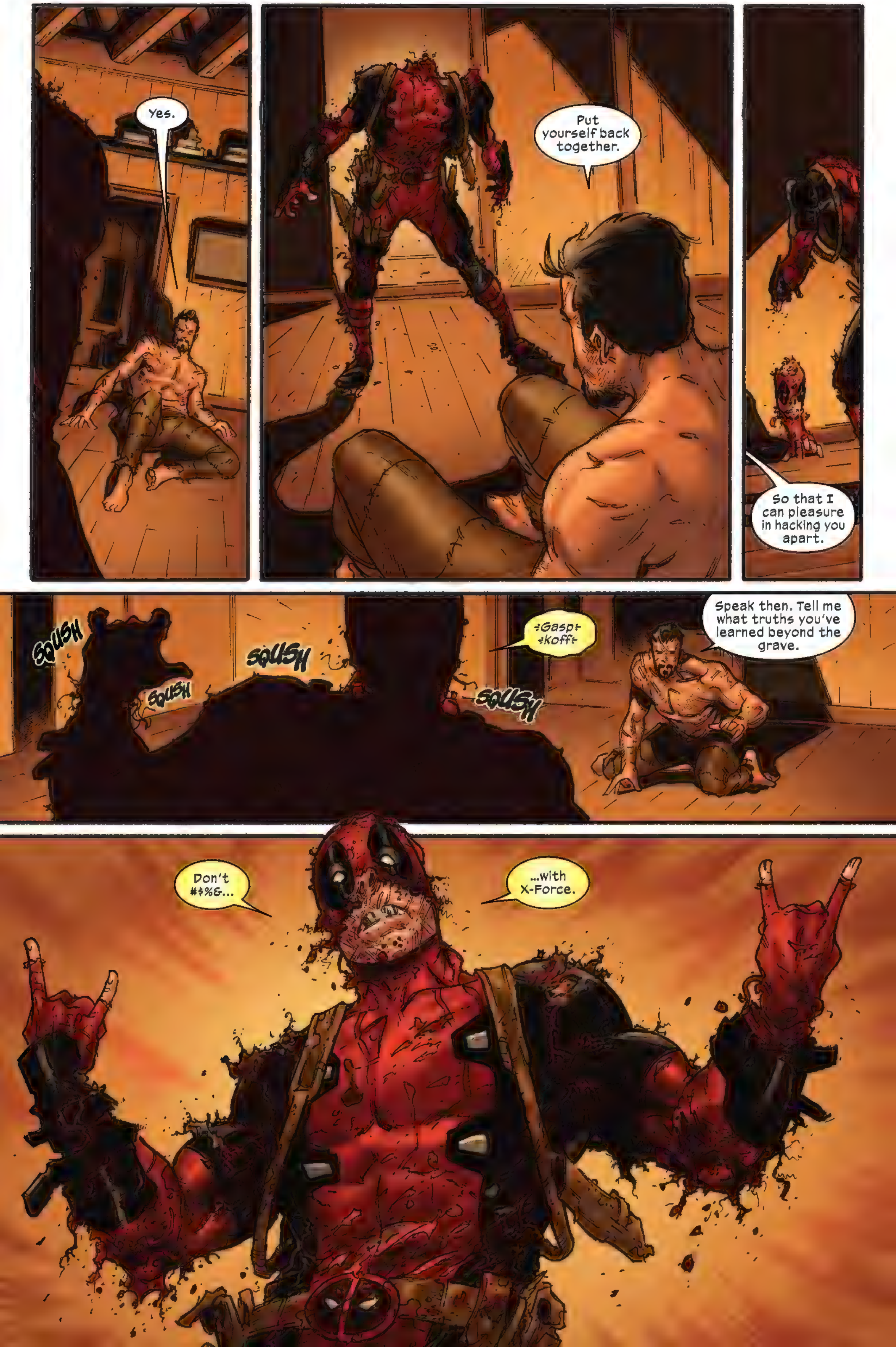

Kraven's hunting lodge. The Arctic north.
When most people think of hunting, two things spring into their mind.
They either think of the moment of death...
...when a finger pulls a trigger, when an arrow whistles through the air, when metal meets flesh.
Or they think of the *aftermath.*
The trophy hung from a wall.
But there is so much--
THHBTHH

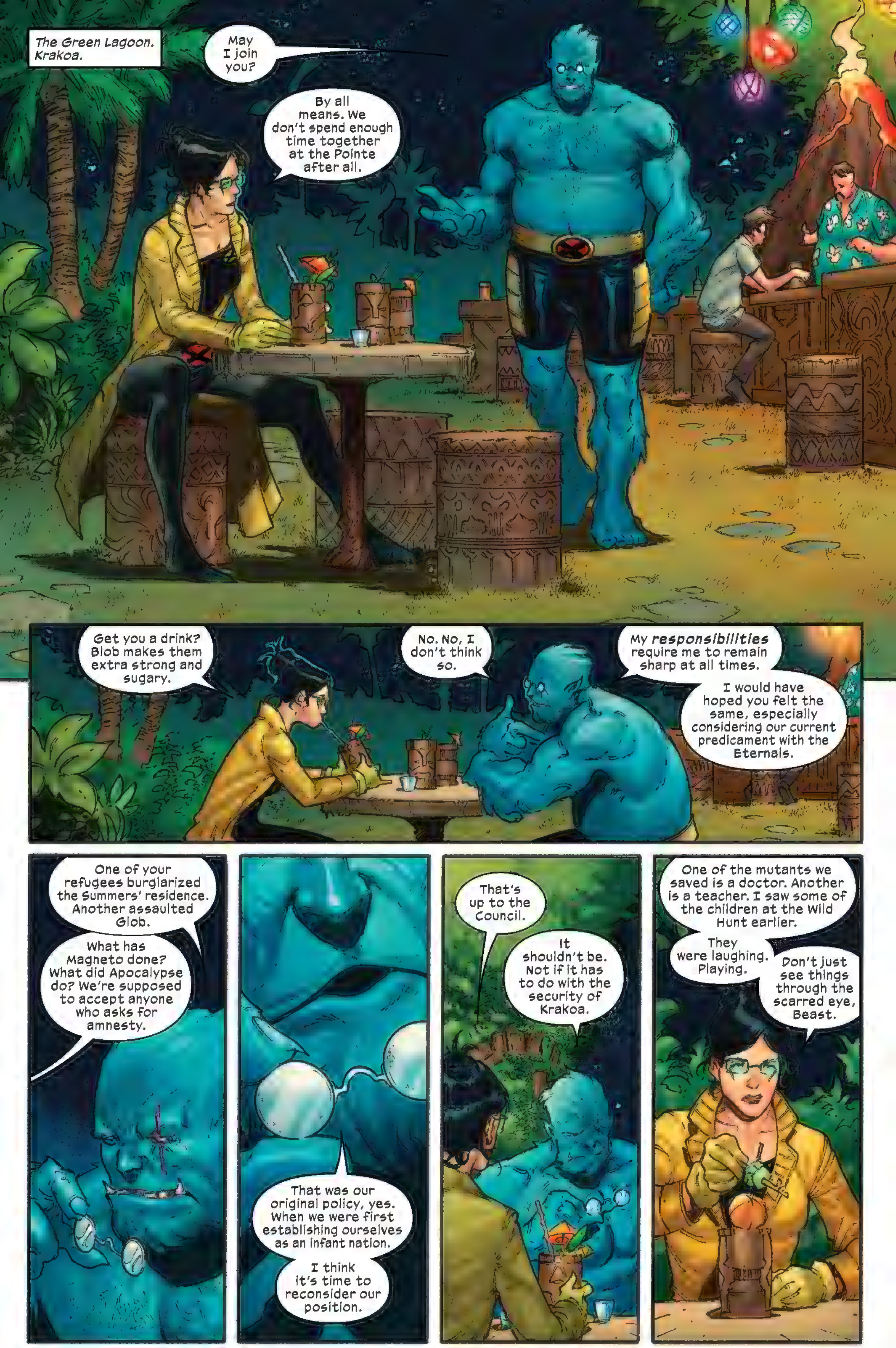

But that's like saying the period is the purpose of a sentence.
There is an anticipatory beginning and a complicated middle before you even approach the end.
Without them, the kill would feel unearned.
So I study maps and surveys.
When I know the water sources and weather patterns, topography and vegetation...
...I know where the animals will likely breed and sleep and eat and hide and escape if wounded.
In the same fashion, I study the anatomy of my prey as if it were geography of its own.
With *strengths* and *vulnerabilities*.
But maybe my favorite part of the process is the gathering and oiling and honing of my arsenal.

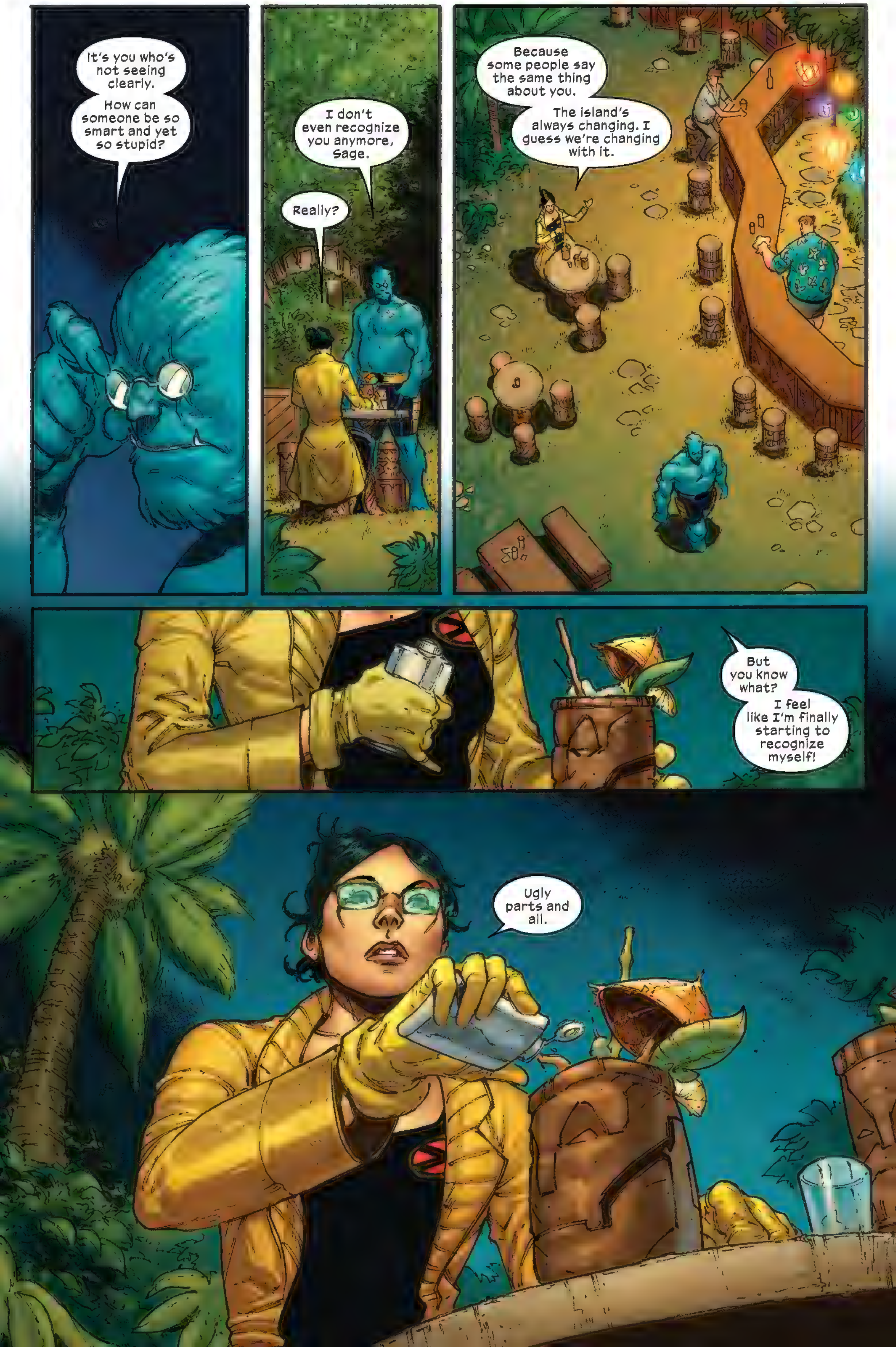

They are more than instruments.
They are an extension of me.
The more time I spend with them, imagining the cut and slash, the stab and hack--
--the more my nerve endings seem to weave into their grain.


THUNK


What is this?
skitter
You don't die easily.
This is a good thing.
CHAK
I prefer to earn my trophies.
Gaa!


Yes.
Put yourself back together.
So that I can pleasure in hacking you apart.
SQUSH
SQUSH
SQUSH
Gasp koff
SQUSH
Speak then. Tell me what truths you've learned beyond the grave.
Don't #$%&...
...with X-Force.


The Green Lagoon. Krakoa.
May I join you?
By all means. We don't spend enough time together at the Pointe after all.
Get you a drink? Blob makes them extra strong and sugary.
No. No, I don't think so.
My *responsibilities* require me to remain sharp at all times.
I would have hoped you felt the same, especially considering our current predicament with the Eternals.
One of your refugees burglarized the Summers' residence. Another assaulted Glob.
What has Magneto done? What did Apocalypse do? We're supposed to accept anyone who asks for amnesty.
That was our original policy, yes. When we were first establishing ourselves as an infant nation.
I think it's time to reconsider our position.
That's up to the Council.
It shouldn't be. Not if it has to do with the security of Krakoa.
One of the mutants we saved is a doctor. Another is a teacher. I saw some of the children at the Wild Hunt earlier.
They were laughing. Playing.
Don't just see things through the scarred eye, Beast.

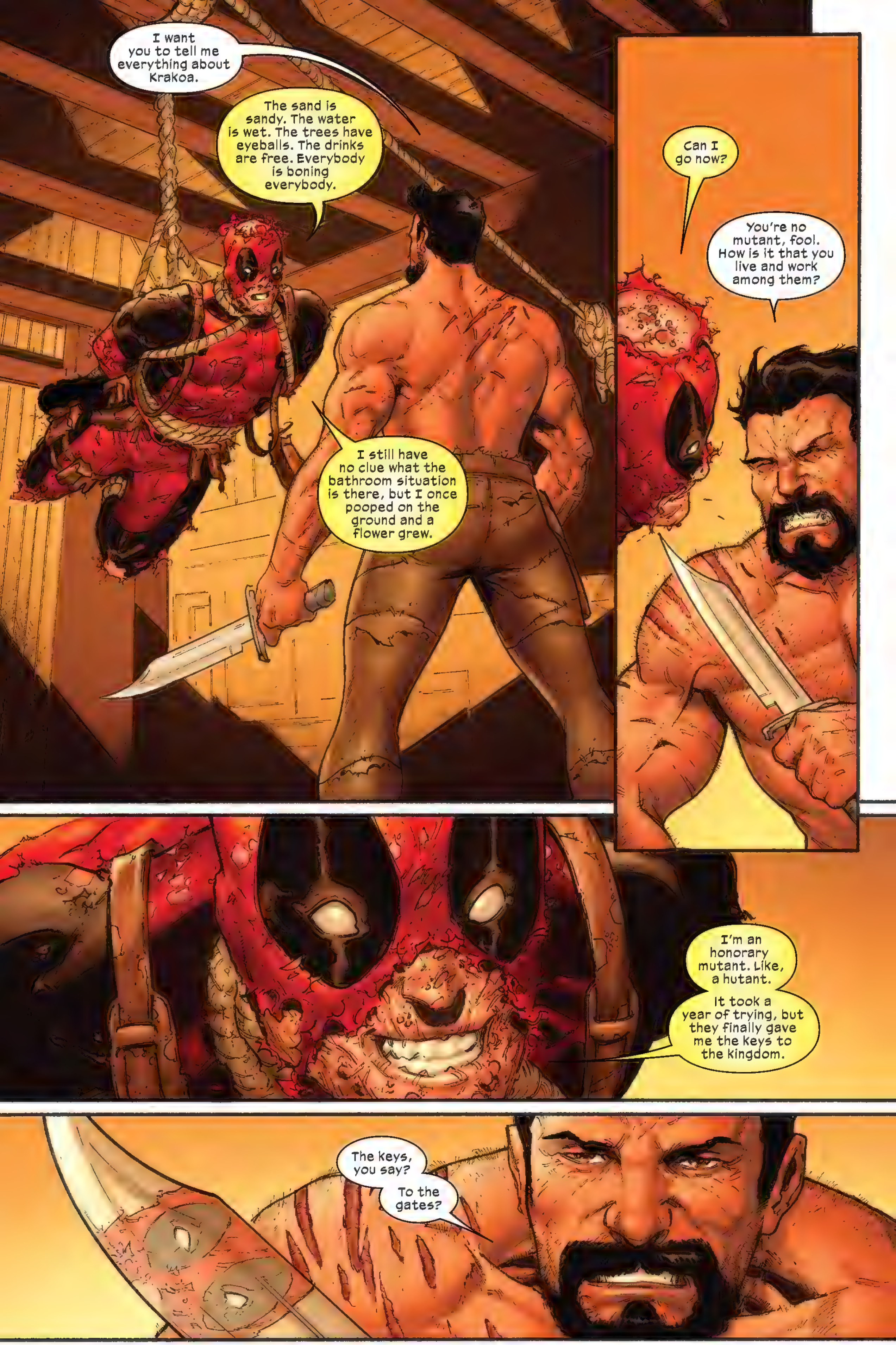

It's you who's not seeing clearly.
How can someone be so smart and yet so stupid?
I don't even recognize you anymore, Sage.
Really?
Because some people say the same thing about you.
The island's always changing. I guess we're changing with it.
But you know what?
I feel like I'm finally starting to recognize myself!
Ugly parts and all.

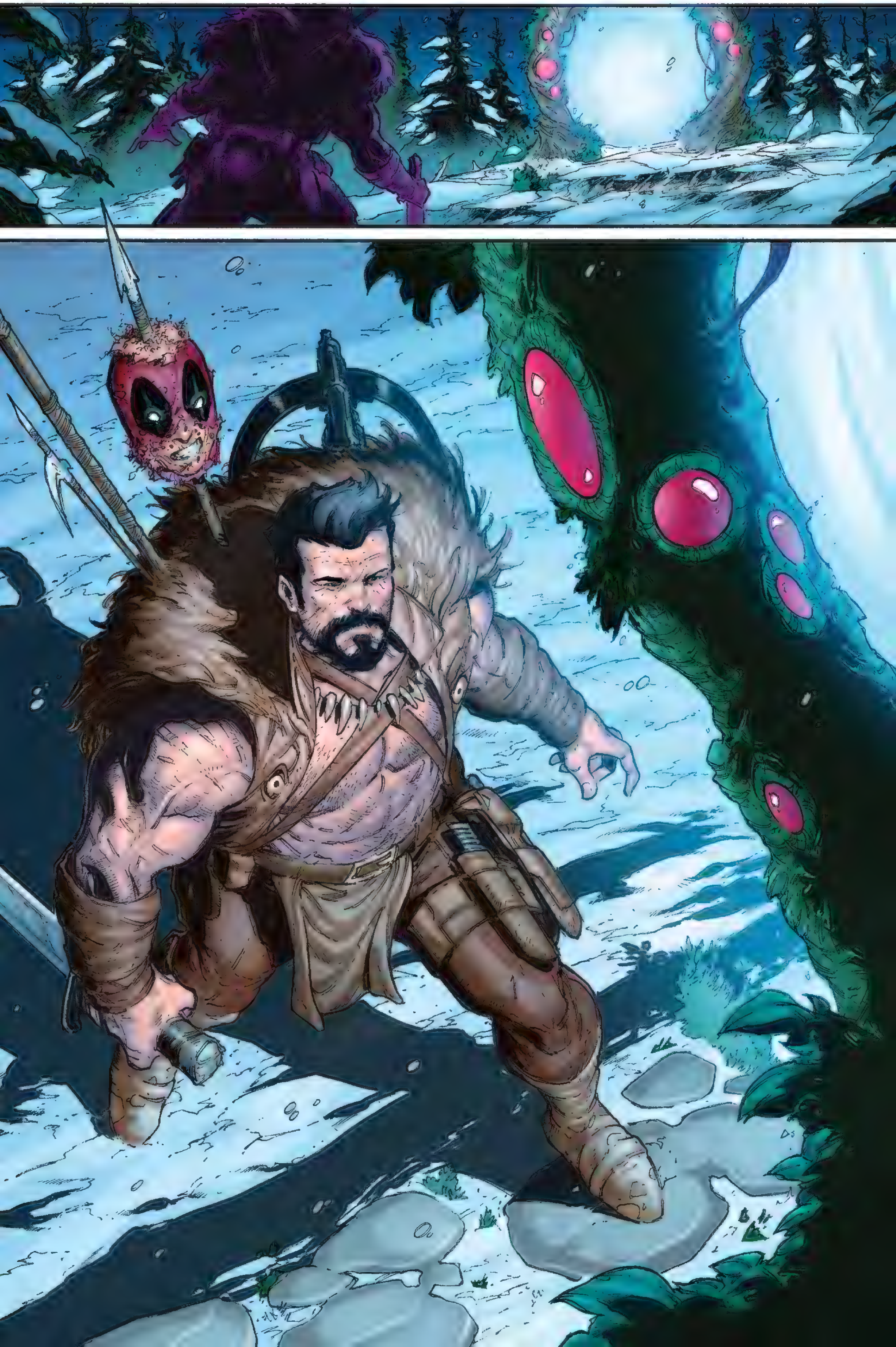
[piotr............[0.0]
[rasputin...[0.0]

“It is my understanding, Beast, that you’re upset about the Russian refugees who arrived recently on our shores. I advise you to keep this position to yourself. Know that if you were to take action against them -- say, if any are deported or happen to go missing -- you should expect a most unwelcome visit from me.”

-- COLOSSUS

[piotr............[0.0]
[rasputin...[0.0]

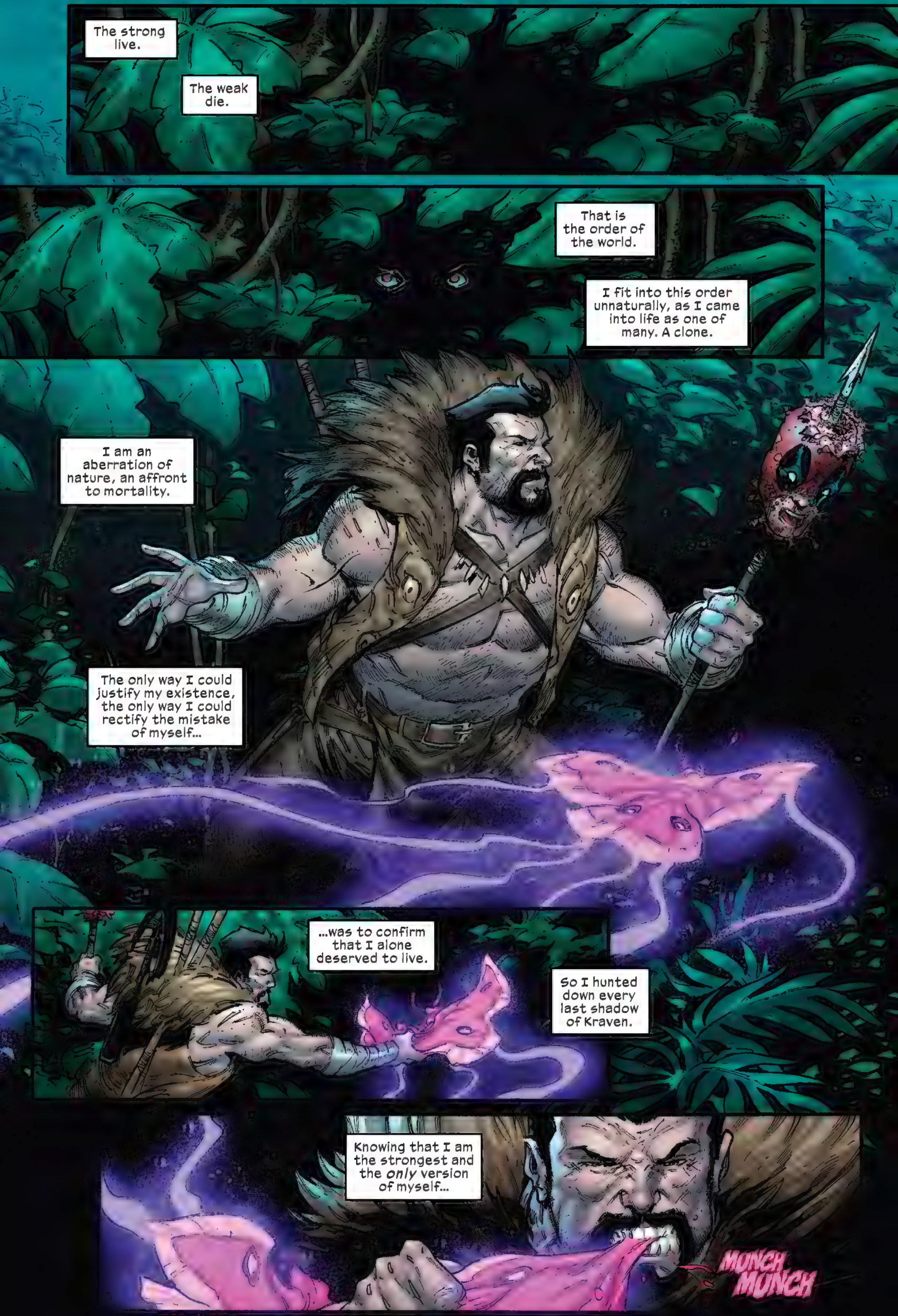

I want you to tell me everything about Krakoa.
The sand is sandy. The water is wet. The trees have eyeballs. The drinks are free. Everybody is boning everybody.
I still have no clue what the bathroom situation is there, but I once pooped on the ground and a flower grew.
Can I go now?
You're no mutant, fool. How is it that you live and work among them?
I'm an honorary mutant. Like, a hutant.
It took a year of trying, but they finally gave me the keys to the kingdom.
The keys, you say?
To the gates?

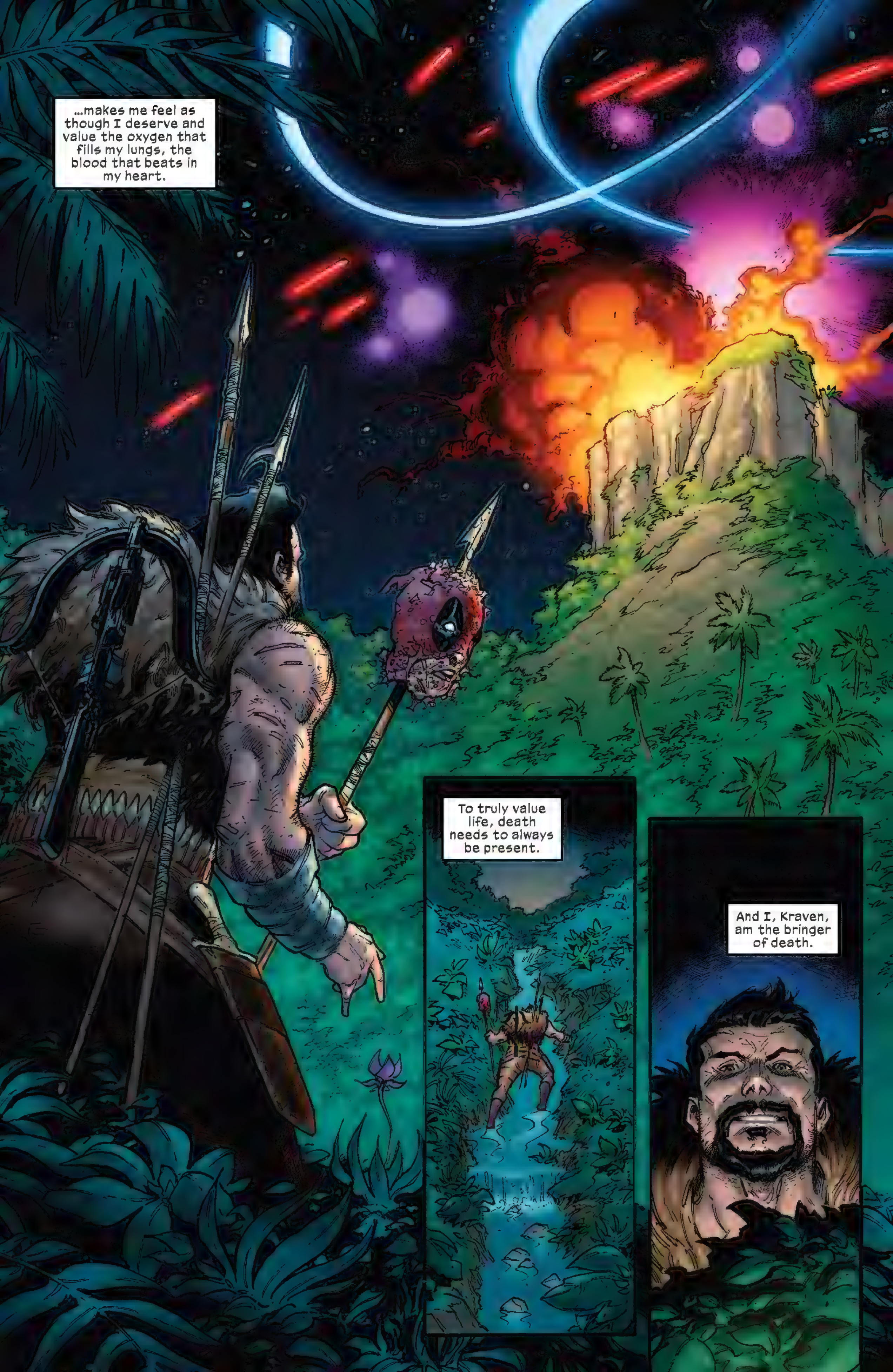


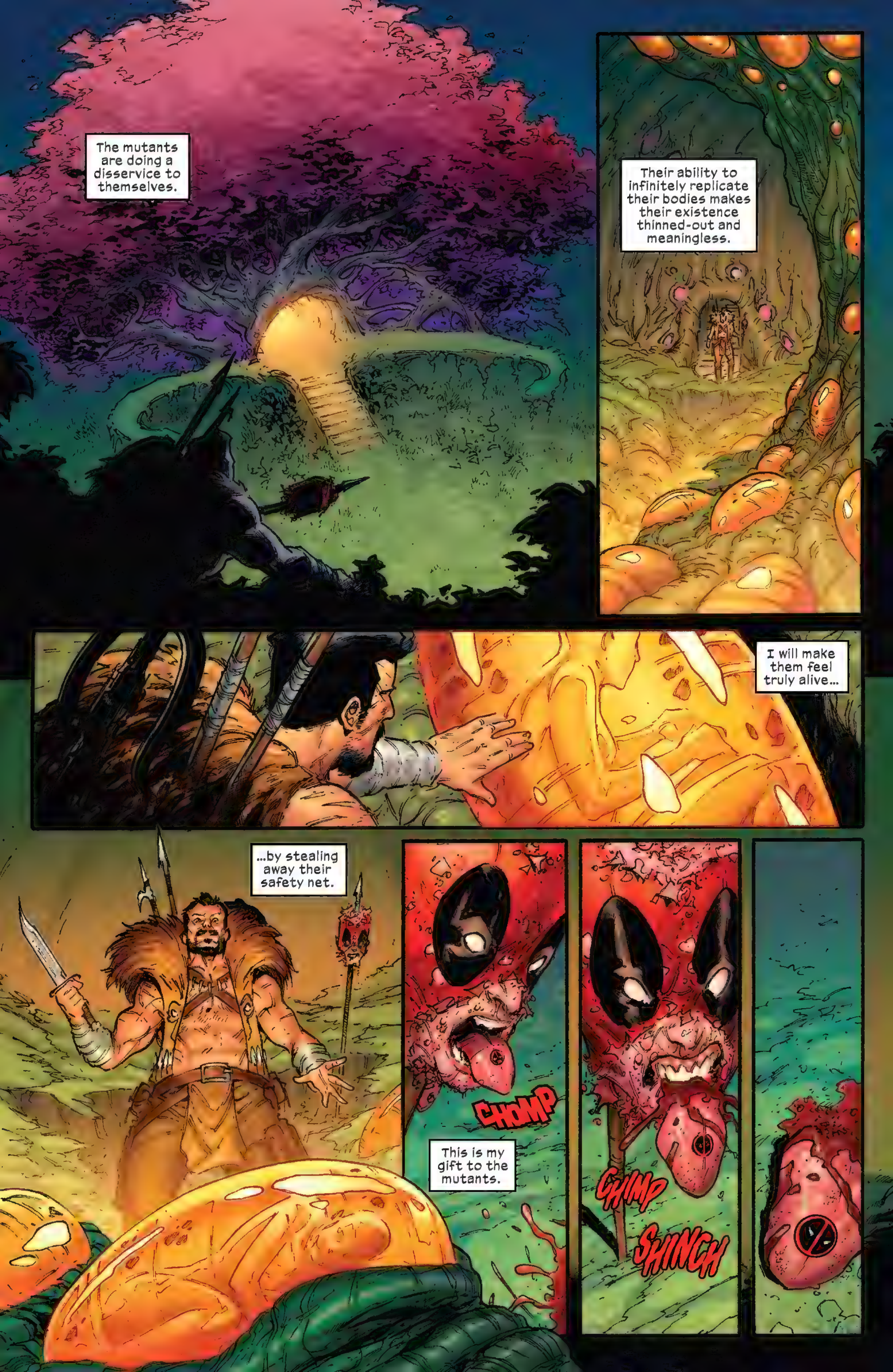
JDC
DVN

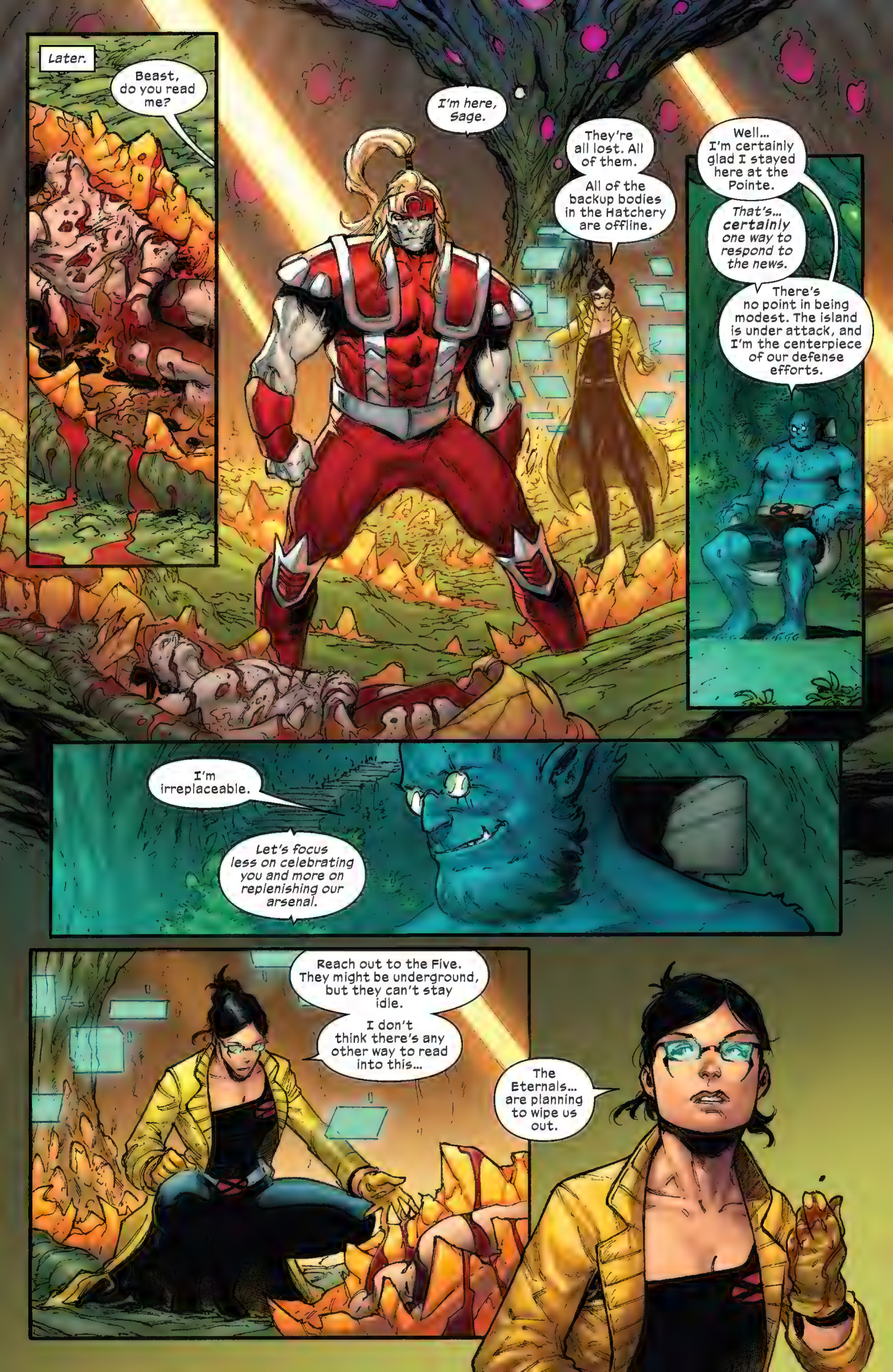
The Hunt for X Part 3: Kraven Kills

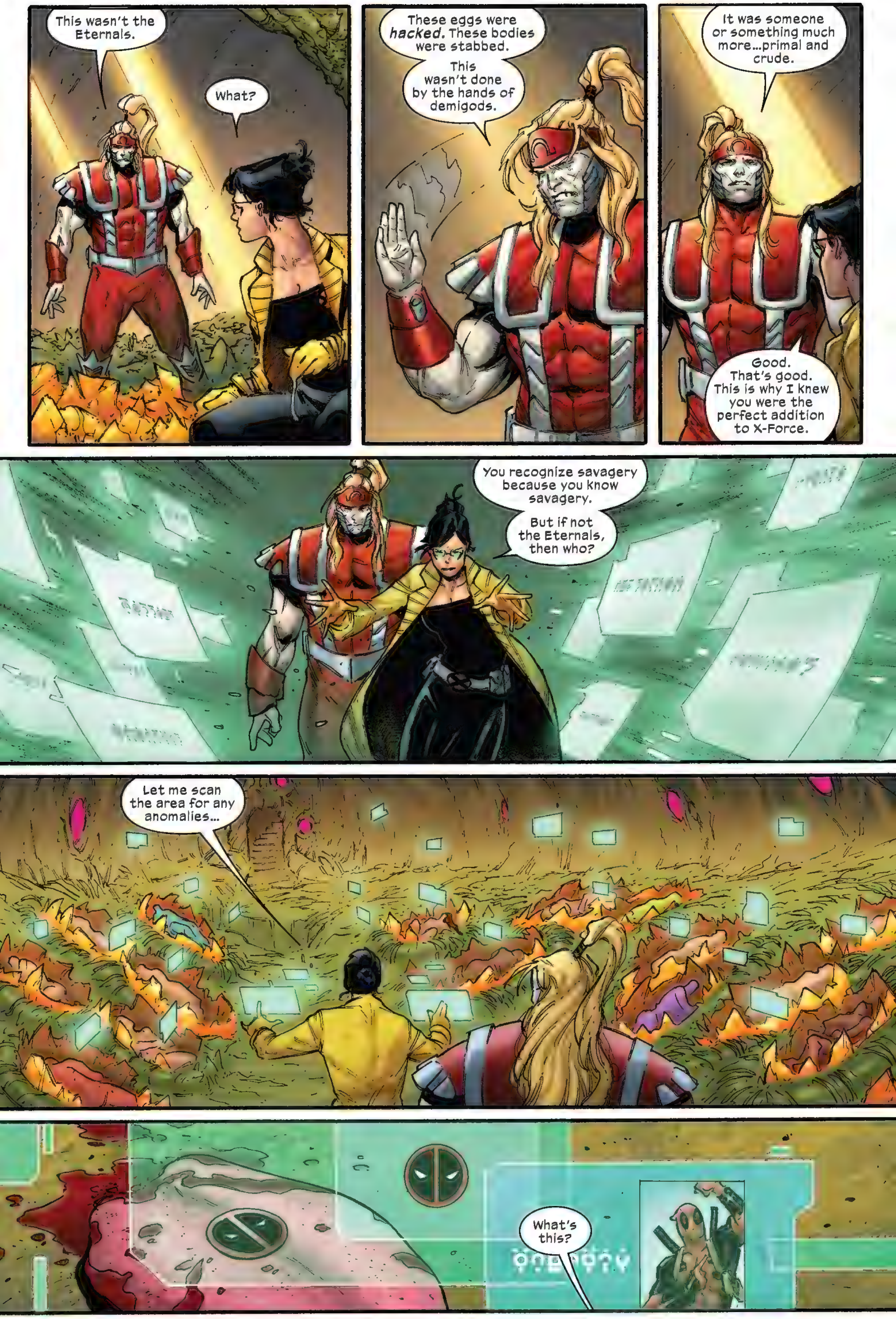
32


The strong live.
The weak die.
That is the order of the world.
I fit into this order unnaturally, as I came into life as one of many. A clone.
I am an aberration of nature, an affront to mortality.
The only way I could justify my existence, the only way I could rectify the mistake of myself...
...was to confirm that I alone deserved to live.
So I hunted down every last shadow of Kraven.
Knowing that I am the strongest and the *only* version of myself...
MUNCH MUNCH


...makes me feel as though I deserve and value the oxygen that fills my lungs, the blood that beats in my heart.
To truly value life, death needs to always be present.
And I, Kraven, am the bringer of death.


The mutants are doing a disservice to themselves.
Their ability to infinitely replicate their bodies makes their existence thinned-out and meaningless.
I will make them feel truly alive...
...by stealing away their safety net.
CHOMP
This is my gift to the mutants.
CHMP
SHINCH


Later.
Beast, do you read me?
I'm here, Sage.
They're all lost. All of them.
All of the backup bodies in the Hatchery are offline.
Well... I'm certainly glad I stayed here at the Pointe.
That's... *certainly* one way to respond to the news.
There's no point in being modest. The island is under attack, and I'm the centerpiece of our defense efforts.
I'm irreplaceable.
Let's focus less on celebrating you and more on replenishing our arsenal.
Reach out to the Five. They might be underground, but they can't stay idle.
I don't think there's any other way to read into this...
The Eternals... are planning to wipe us out.


This wasn't the Eternals.
What?
These eggs were *hacked.* These bodies were stabbed.
This wasn't done by the hands of demigods.
It was someone or something much more...primal and crude.
Good. That's good. This is why I knew you were the perfect addition to X-Force.
You recognize savagery because you know savagery.
But if not the Eternals, then who?
Let me scan the area for any anomalies...
What's this?

SAGE'S LOGBOOK: FIELD REPORT

<<Action Item 1>>

Sample: Severed Tongue

Location: Hatchery

Flagged
 *chew marks indicate severance via mastication
 *tongue stud implies the bio-sample did not come from resurrection egg

DNA test::::::<pending>::::::

[Deadpool]
[[status: M.I.A.]]

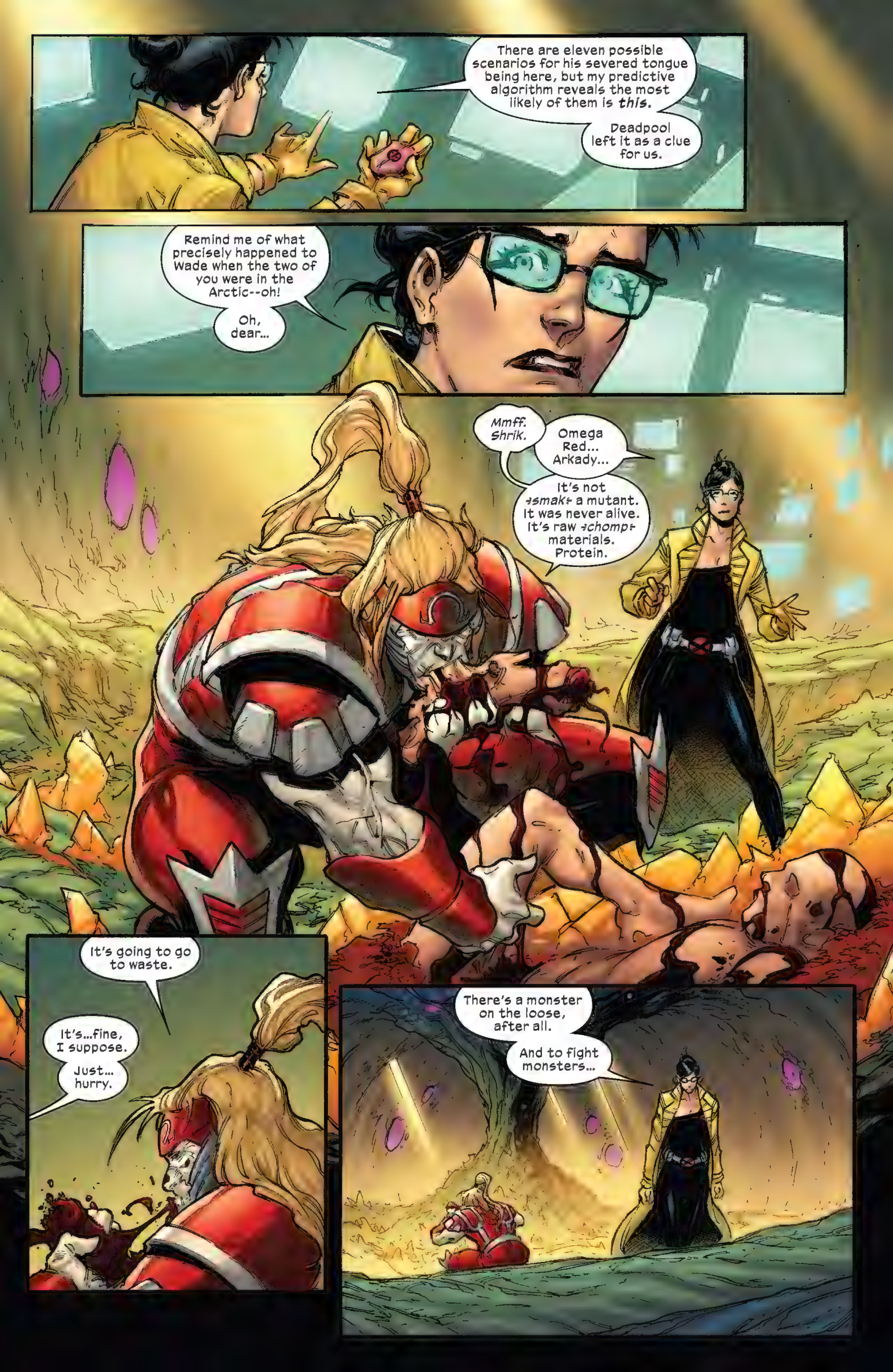
<<Action Item 2>>

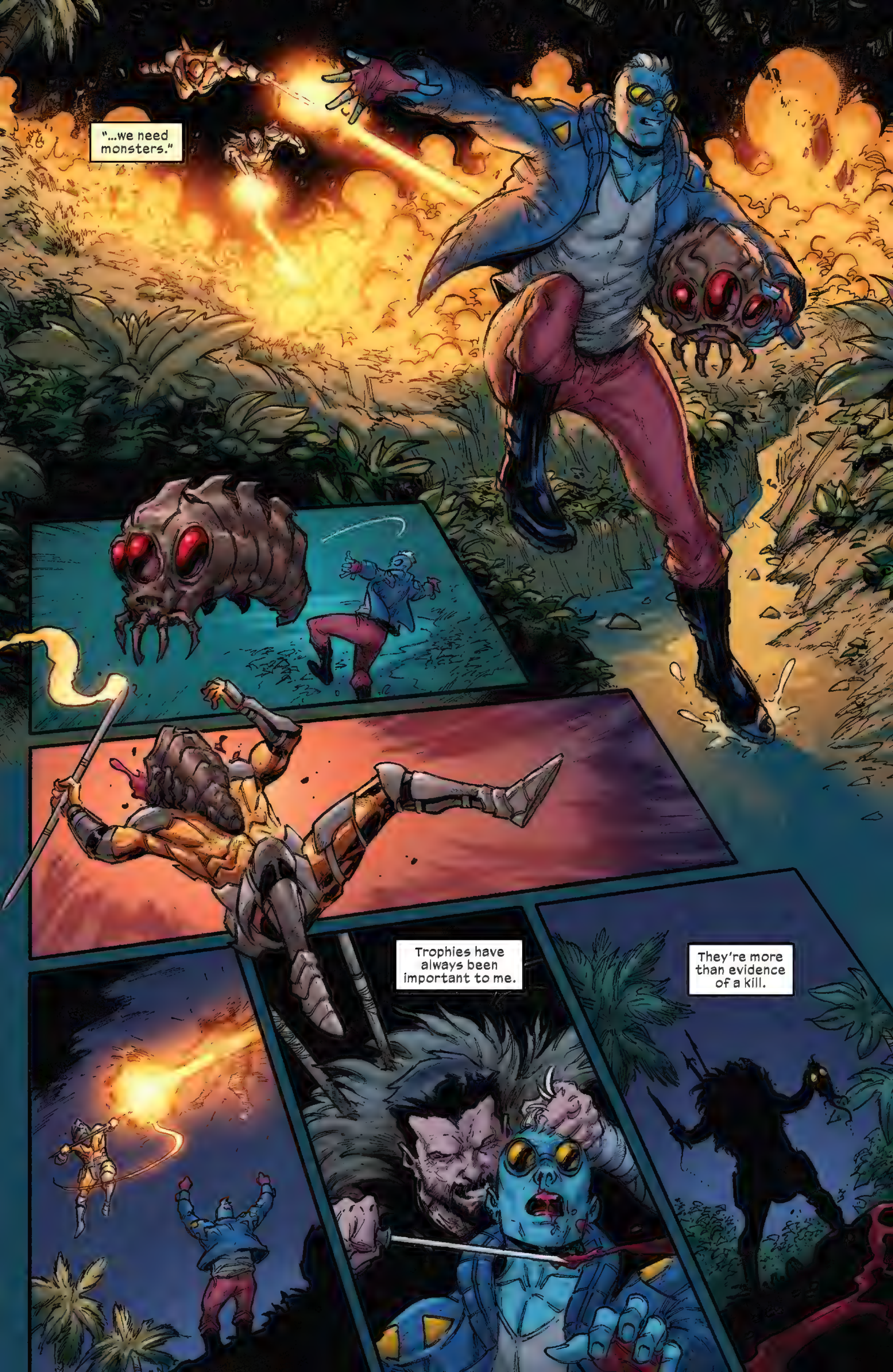
Gate Traffic Logs:::::::<Scanning>::::::::

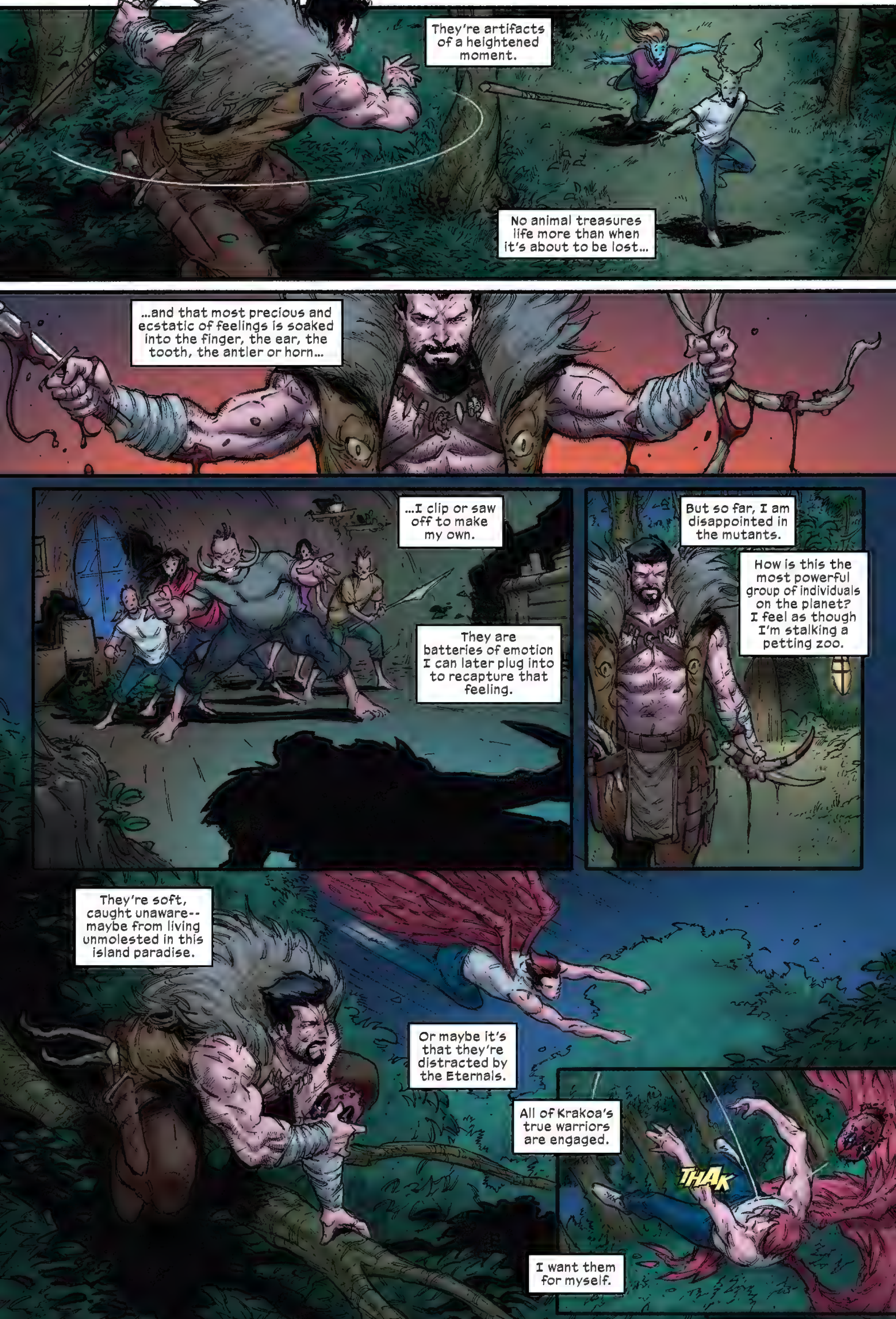
[Deadpool]
[[status: arrival via Arctic gate]]

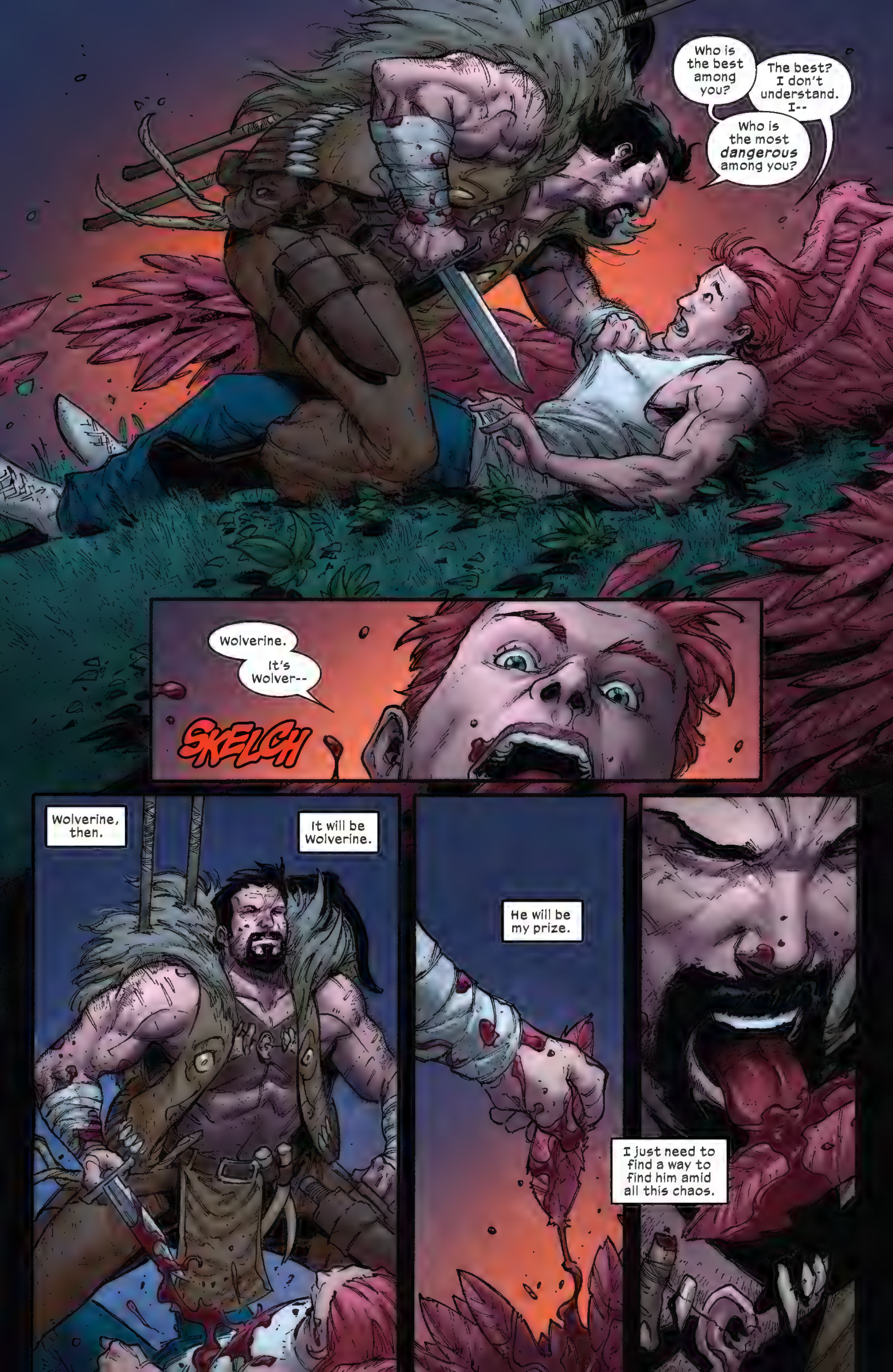
Comment: Wade's arrival predates the attack on the Hatchery by only an hour.

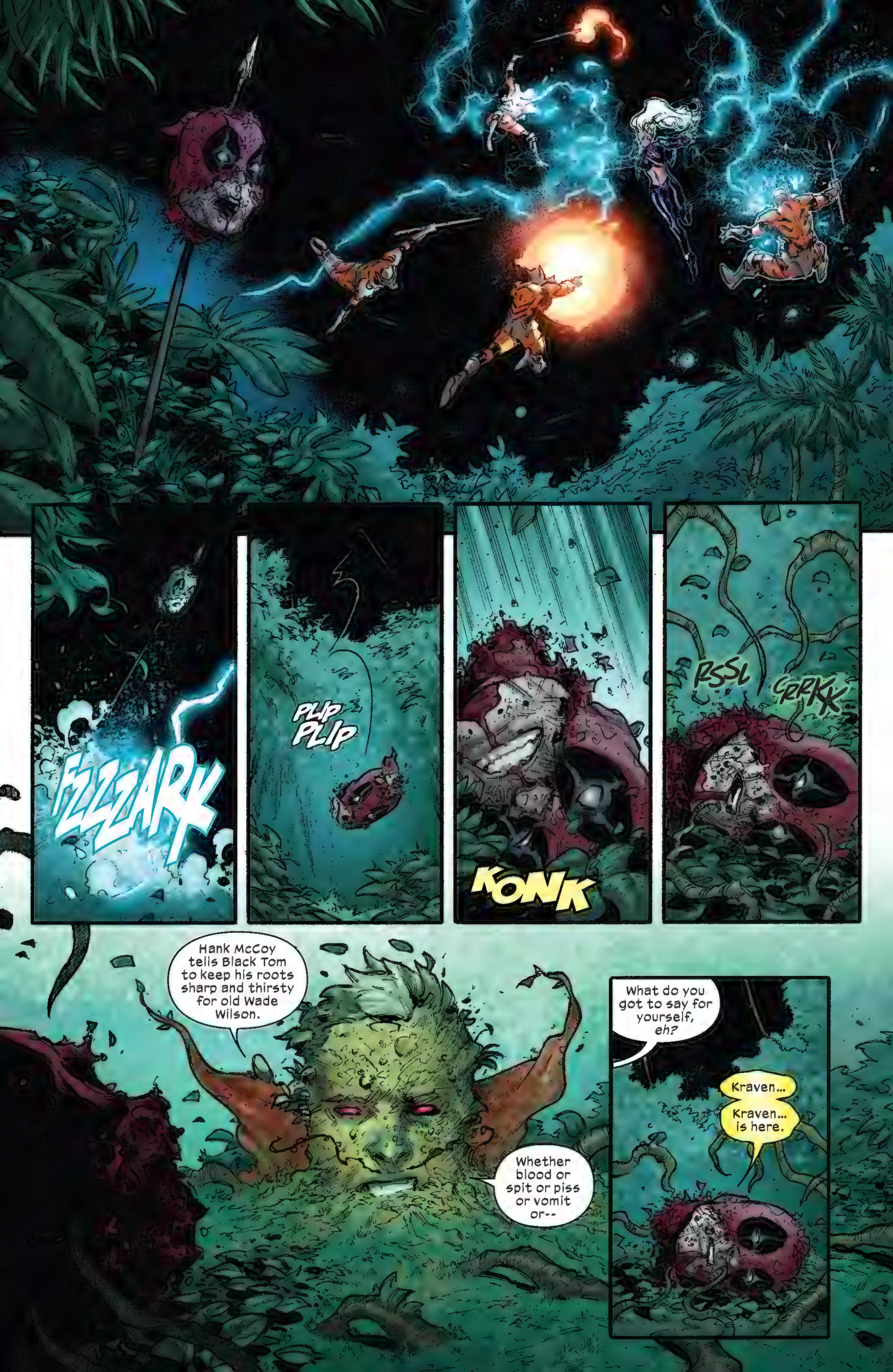
Comment: Normally, I would have noticed his arrival earlier, but ~~I was at the Green Lagoon earlier, and~~ the Eternals' attack has fragmented my focus.

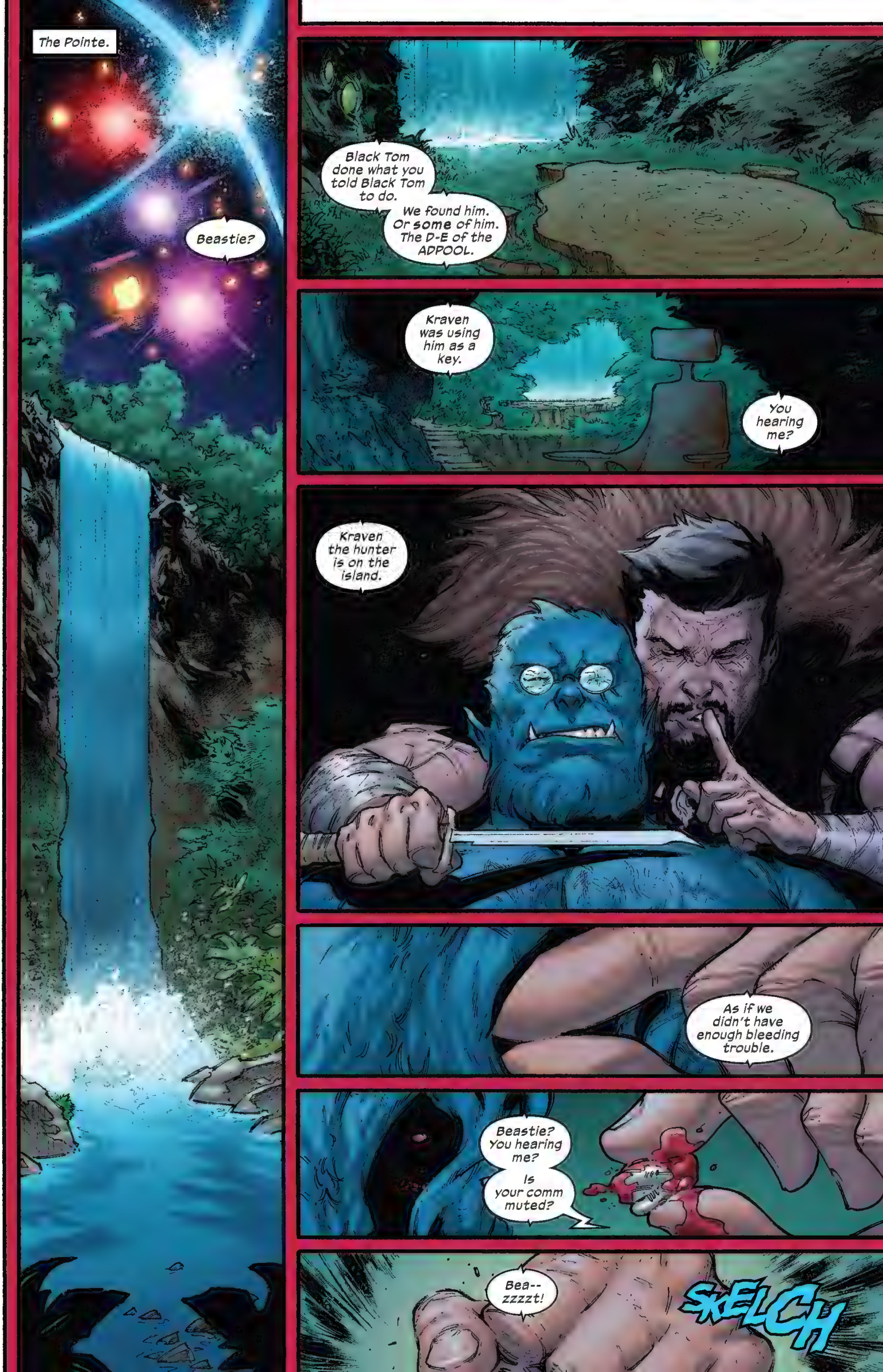

There are eleven possible scenarios for his severed tongue being here, but my predictive algorithm reveals the most likely of them is *this.*
Deadpool left it as a clue for us.
Remind me of what precisely happened to Wade when the two of you were in the Arctic--oh!
Oh, dear...
Mmff. Shrik.
Omega Red... Arkady...
It's not *→smak←* a mutant. It was never alive. It's raw *→chomp←* materials. Protein.
It's going to go to waste.
It's...fine, I suppose.
Just... hurry.
There's a monster on the loose, after all.
And to fight monsters...

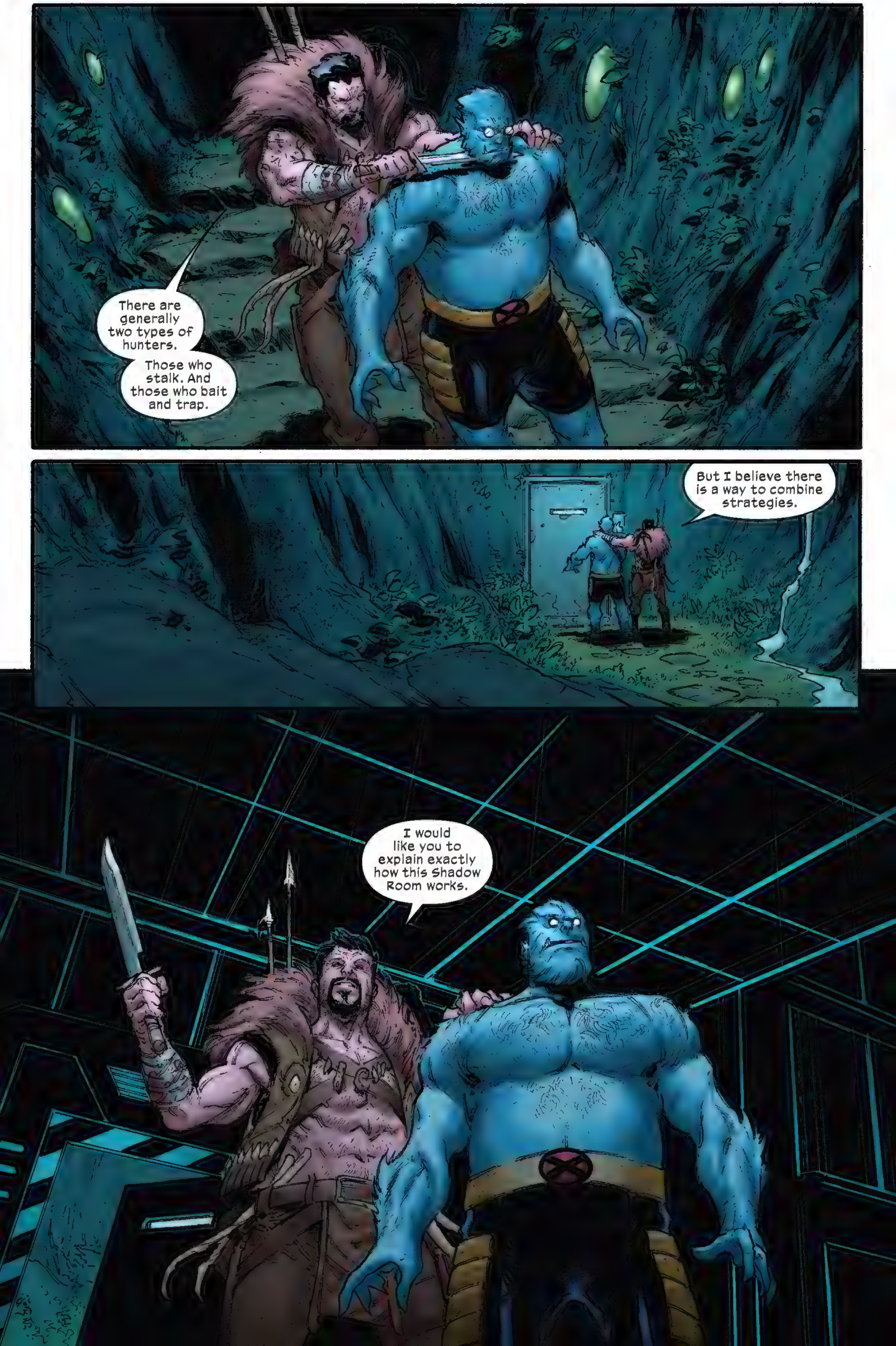

"…we need monsters."
Trophies have always been important to me.
They're more than evidence of a kill.


They're artifacts of a heightened moment.
No animal treasures life more than when it's about to be lost...
...and that most precious and ecstatic of feelings is soaked into the finger, the ear, the tooth, the antler or horn...
...I clip or saw off to make my own.
They are batteries of emotion I can later plug into to recapture that feeling.
But so far, I am disappointed in the mutants.
How is this the most powerful group of individuals on the planet? I feel as though I'm stalking a petting zoo.
They're soft, caught unaware-- maybe from living unmolested in this island paradise.
Or maybe it's that they're distracted by the Eternals.
All of Krakoa's true warriors are engaged.
THAK
I want them for myself.


Who is the best among you?
The best? I don't understand. I--
Who is the most *dangerous* among you?
Wolverine.
It's Wolver--
SKELCH
Wolverine, then.
It will be Wolverine.
He will be my prize.
I just need to find a way to find him amid all this chaos.


FZZZARK
PLIP PLIP
KONK
RSSL
CRRKK
Hank McCoy tells Black Tom to keep his roots sharp and thirsty for old Wade Wilson.
Whether blood or spit or piss or vomit or--
What do you got to say for yourself, eh?
Kraven...
Kraven... is here.


The Pointe.
Beastie?
Black Tom done what you told Black Tom to do.
We found him. Or **some** of him. The D-E of the ADPOOL.
Kraven was using him as a key.
You hearing me?
Kraven the hunter is on the island.
As if we didn't have enough bleeding trouble.
Beastie? You hearing me?
Is your comm muted?
Bea-- zzzzt!
SKELCH


There are generally two types of hunters.
Those who stalk. And those who bait and trap.
But I believe there is a way to combine strategies.
I would like you to explain exactly how this Shadow Room works.

SHADOW ROOM PROTOCOLS

Hard-Light Installations
Rolling Floor
Expanding Walls
Backup Programs [select]

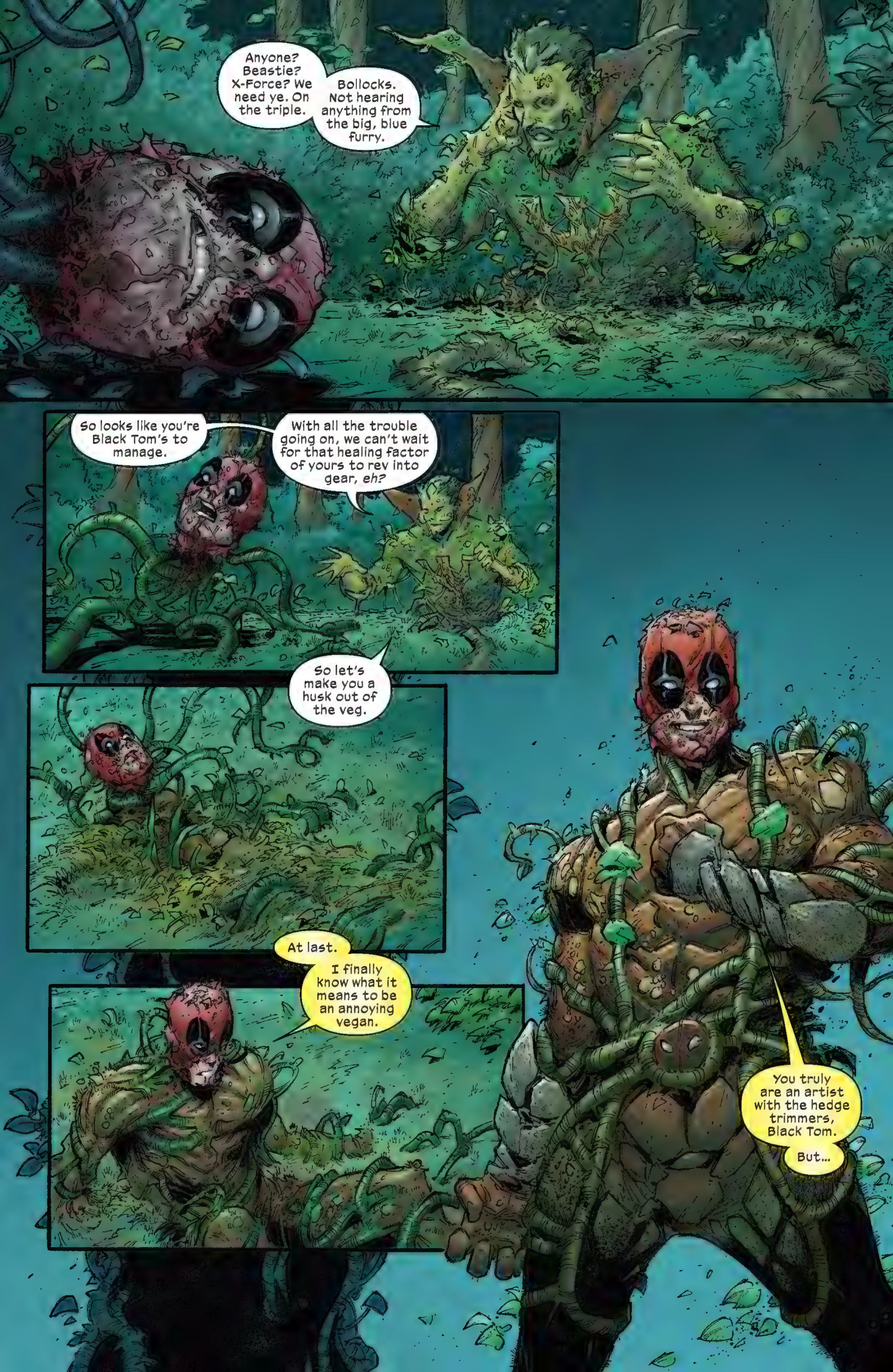
Backup Programs [[selected]]

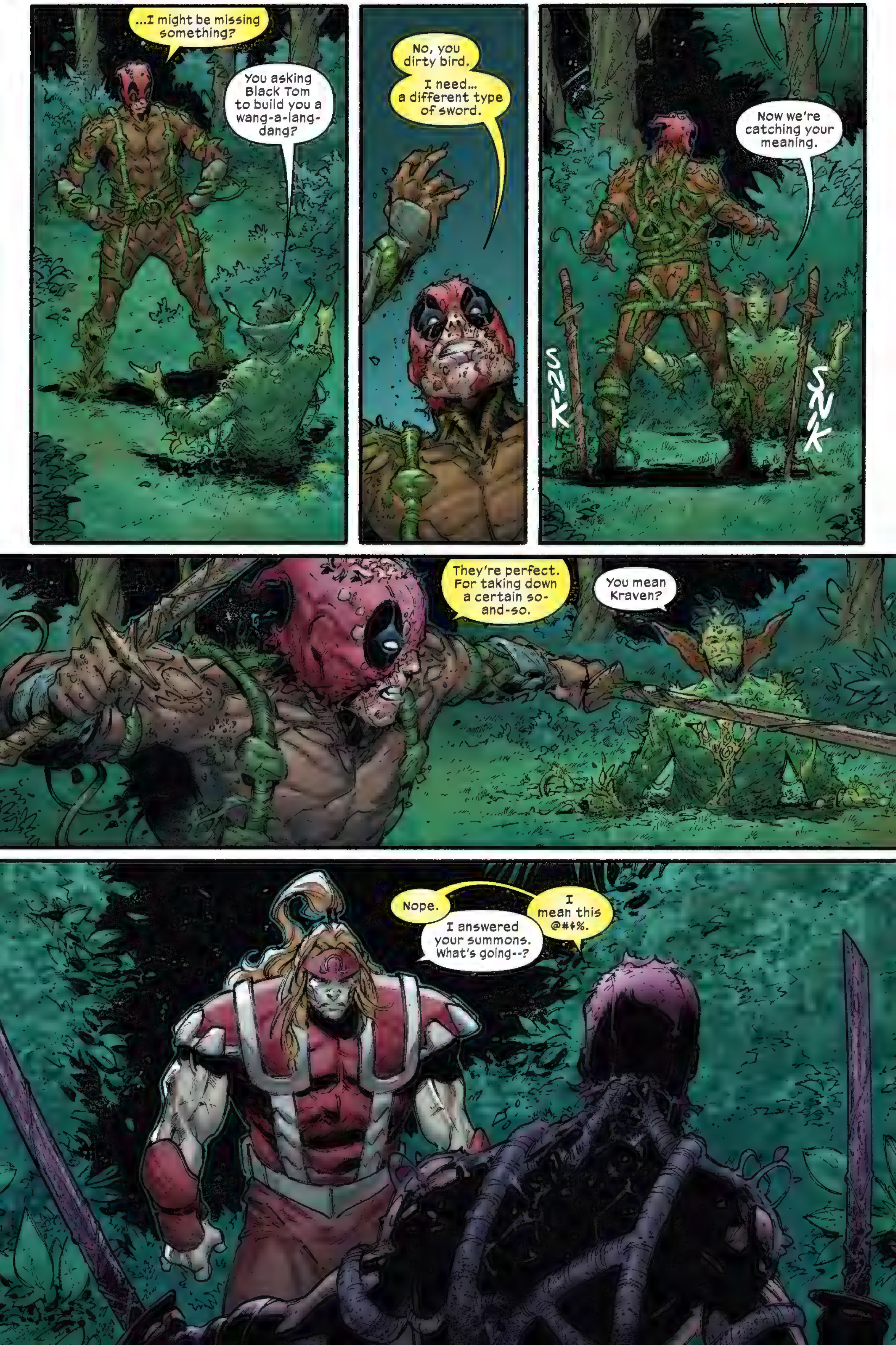
Offload Data Drive
Sexy Time <Beast Access Only>
Incursion Defense [select]

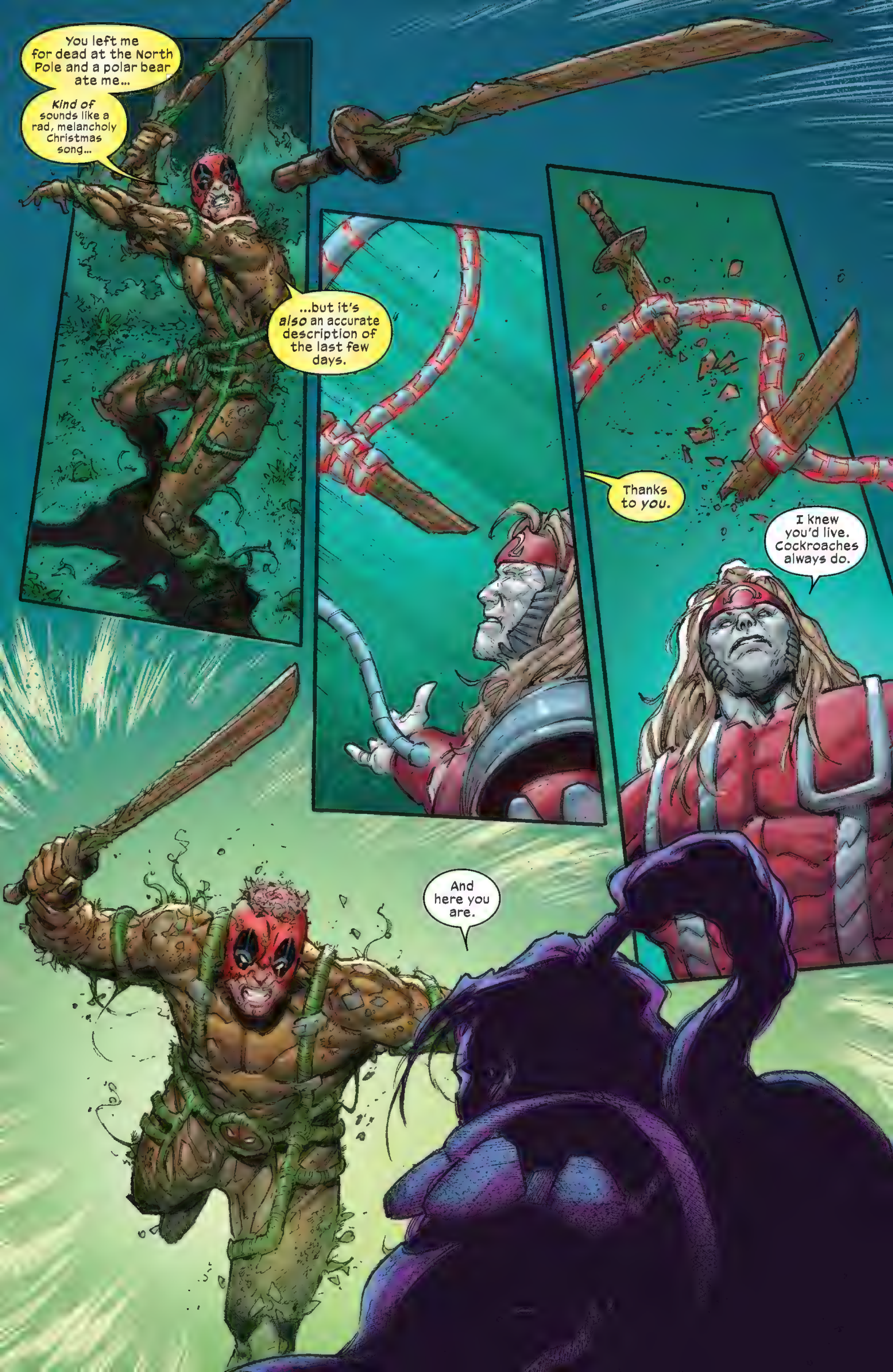
Incursion Defense [[selected]]

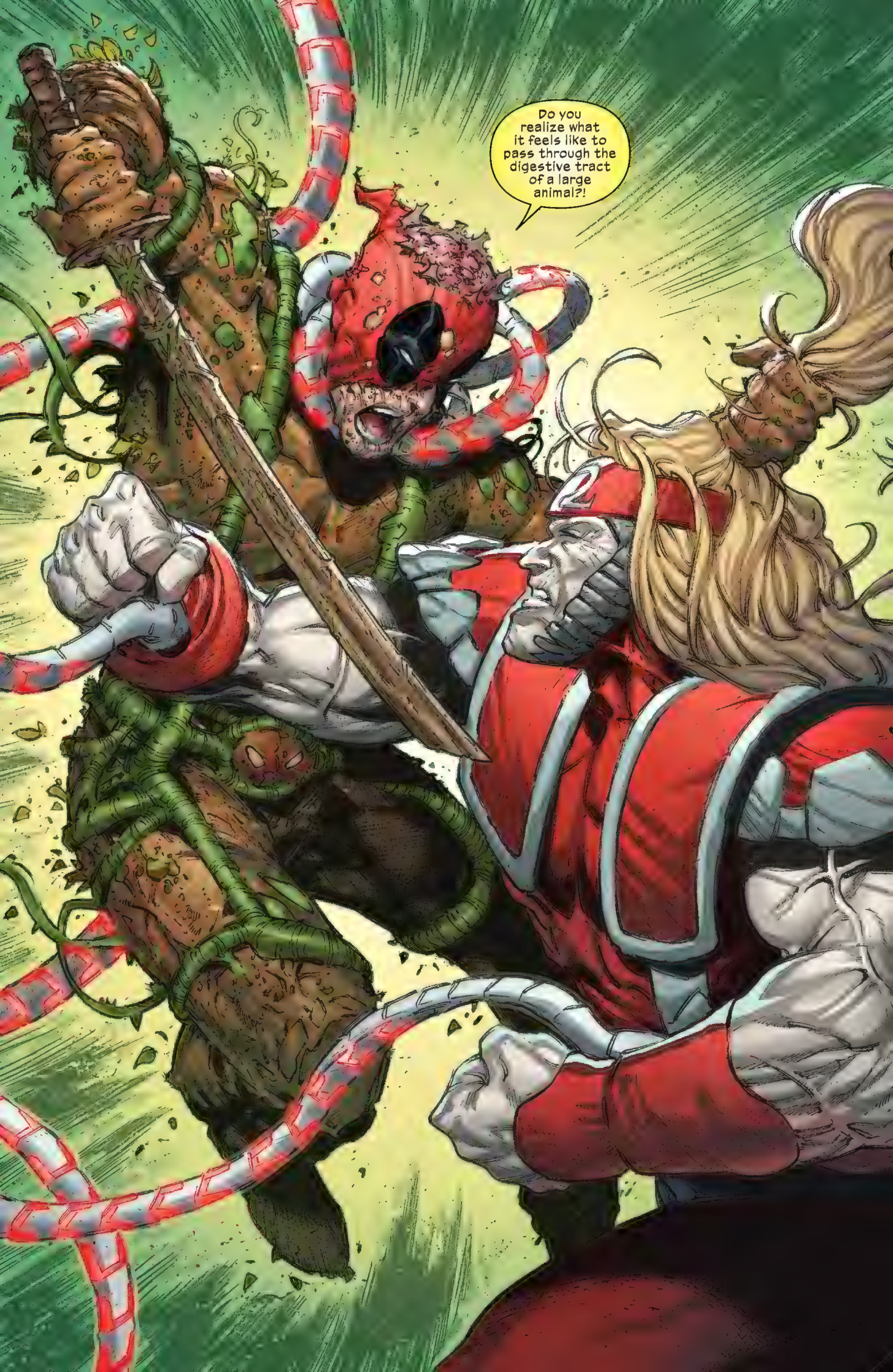
Emergency Access Only

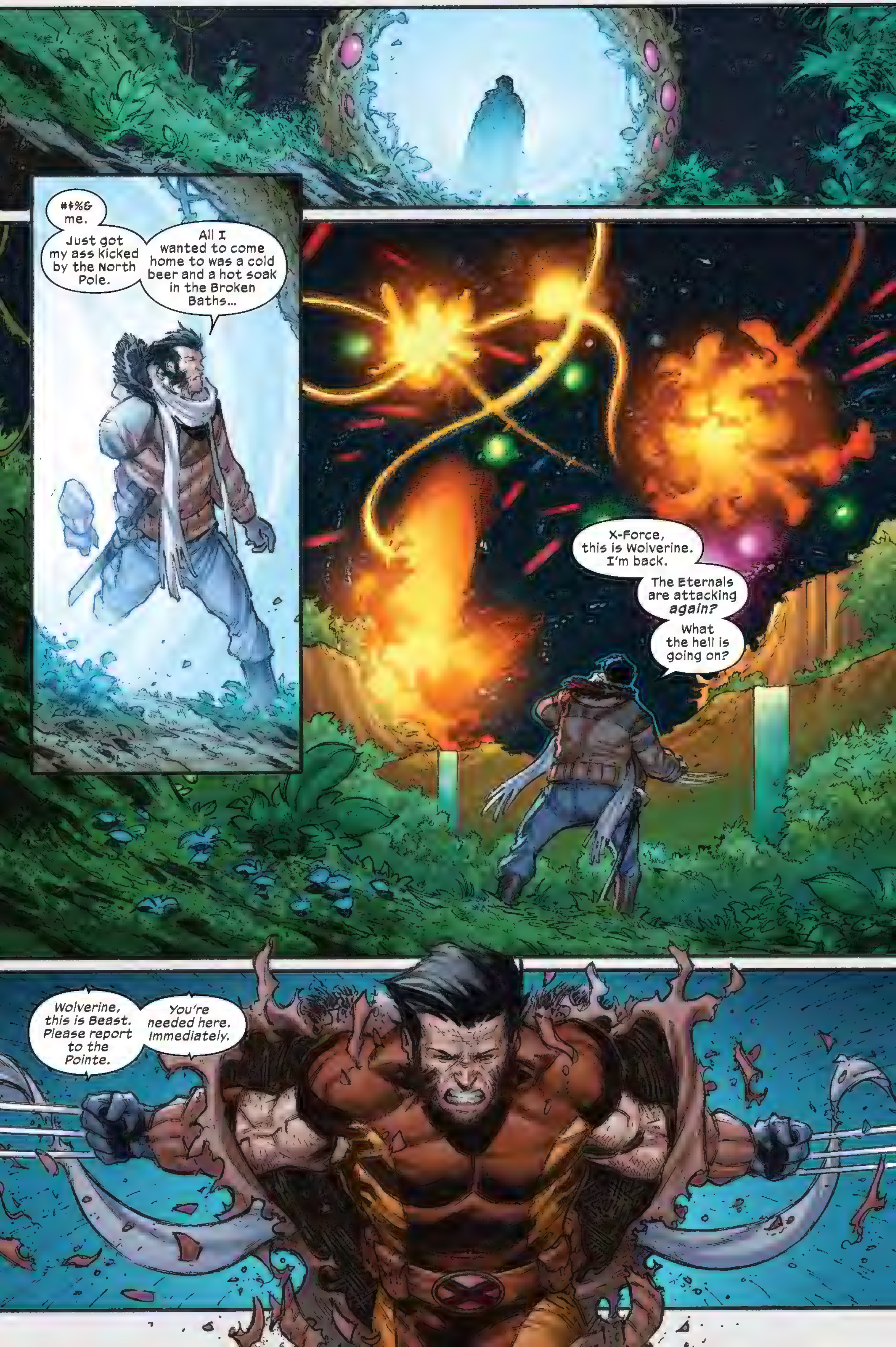
If the Pointe is breached, the Shadow Room can be used as a trap and/or weapon. All safety protocols will cancel out. The hard-light installations will hurt--will kill--all intruding bio-matter.

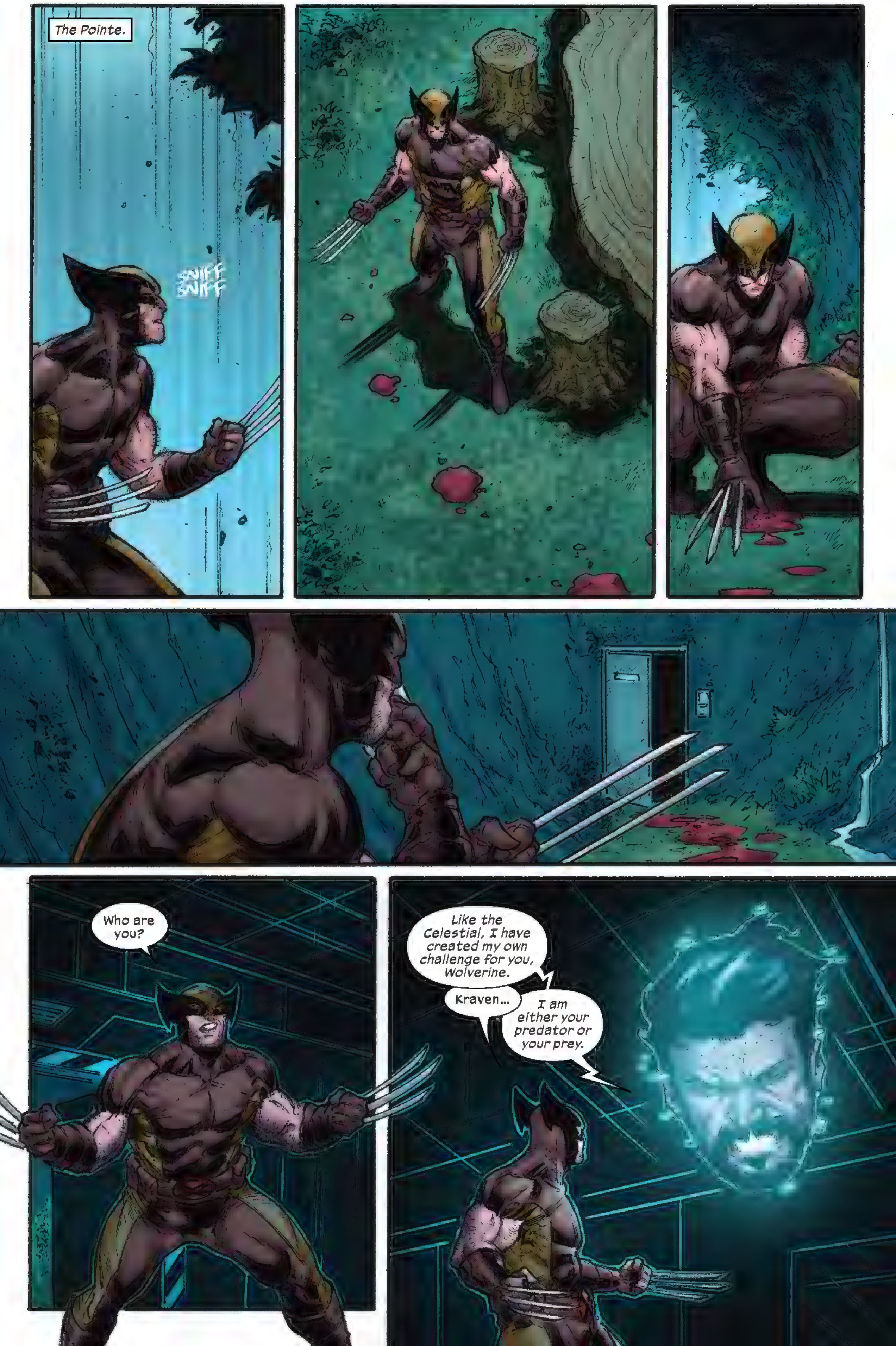

Anyone? Beastie? X-Force? We need ye. On the triple.
Bollocks. Not hearing anything from the big, blue furry.
So looks like you're Black Tom's to manage.
With all the trouble going on, we can't wait for that healing factor of yours to rev into gear, *eh?*
So let's make you a husk out of the veg.
At last.
I finally know what it means to be an annoying vegan.
You truly are an artist with the hedge trimmers, Black Tom.
But...

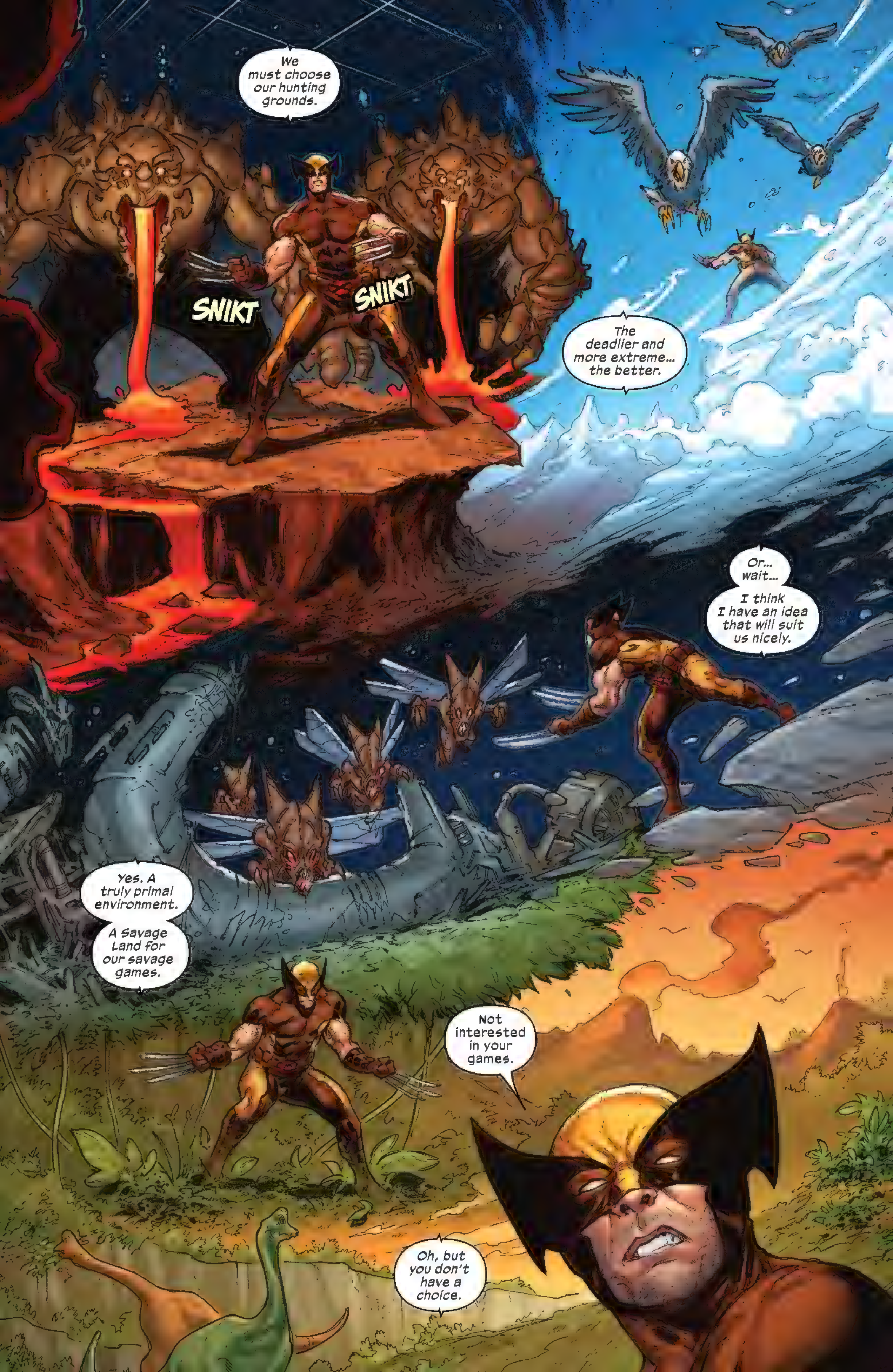

...I might be missing something?
You asking Black Tom to build you a wang-a-lang-dang?
No, you dirty bird.
I need... a different type of sword.
Now we're catching your meaning.
SNIK
SNIK
They're perfect. For taking down a certain so-and-so.
You mean Kraven?
Nope.
I answered your summons. What's going--?
I mean this @#$%.

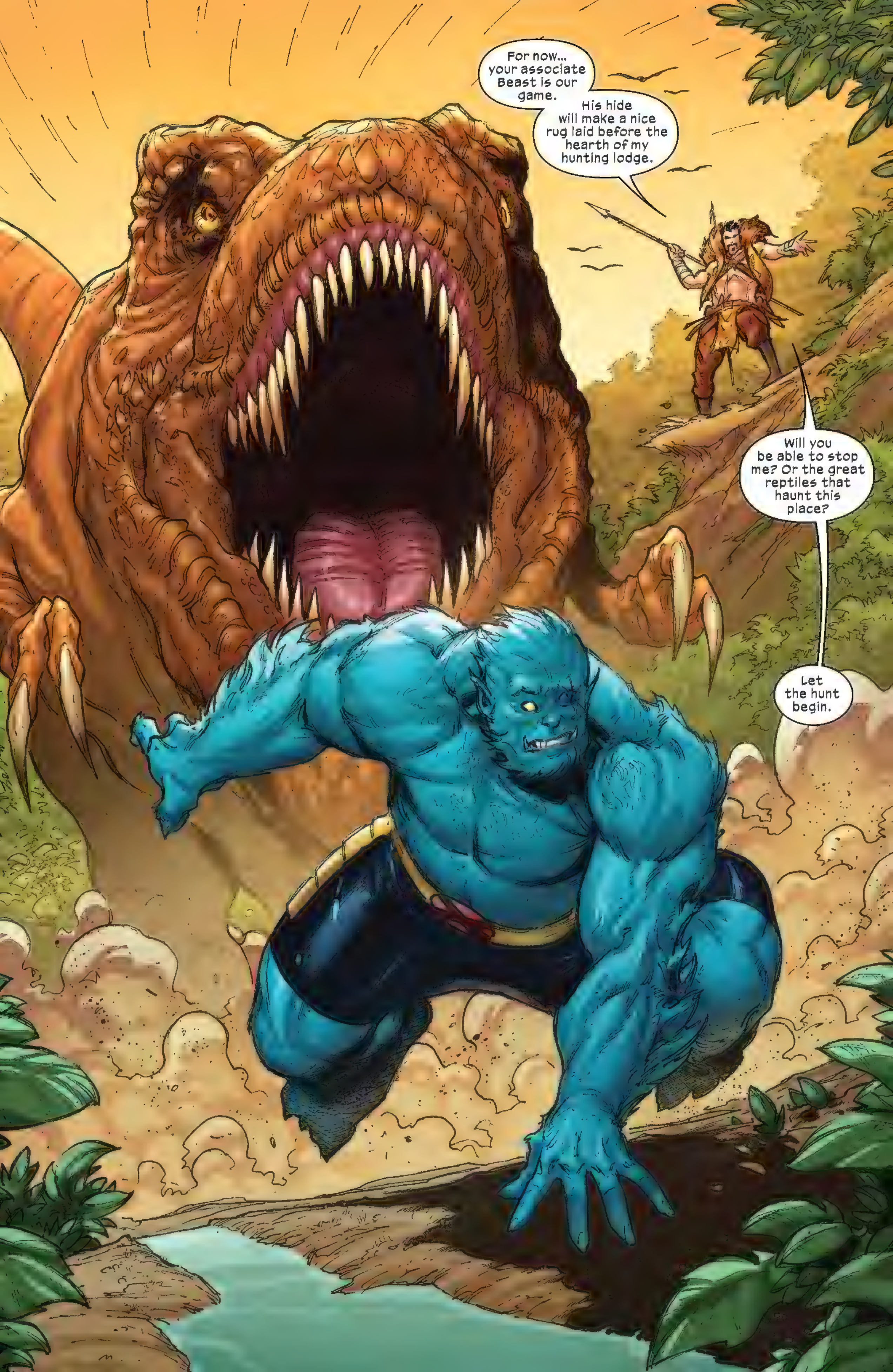

You left me for dead at the North Pole and a polar bear ate me...
Kind of sounds like a rad, melancholy Christmas song...
...but it's *also* an accurate description of the last few days.
Thanks to *you.*
I knew you'd live. Cockroaches always do.
And here you are.


Do you realize what it feels like to pass through the digestive tract of a large animal?!


#$%& me.
Just got my ass kicked by the North Pole.
All I wanted to come home to was a cold beer and a hot soak in the Broken Baths...
X-Force, this is Wolverine. I'm back.
The Eternals are attacking *again?*
What the hell is going on?
Wolverine, this is Beast. Please report to the Pointe.
You're needed here. Immediately.

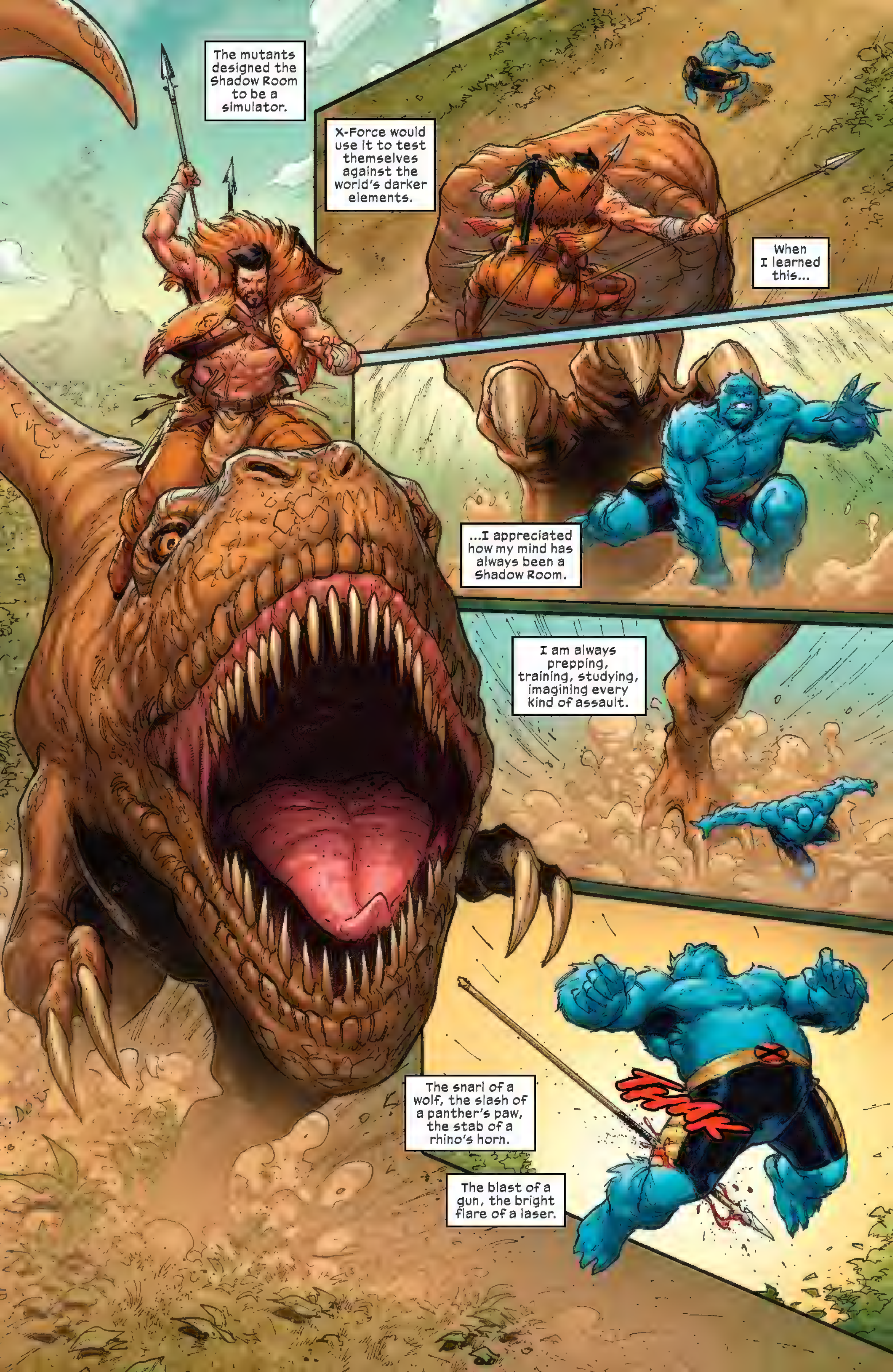

The Pointe.
SNIFF SNIFF
Who are you?
Like the Celestial, I have created my own challenge for you, Wolverine.
Kraven...
I am either your predator or your prey.

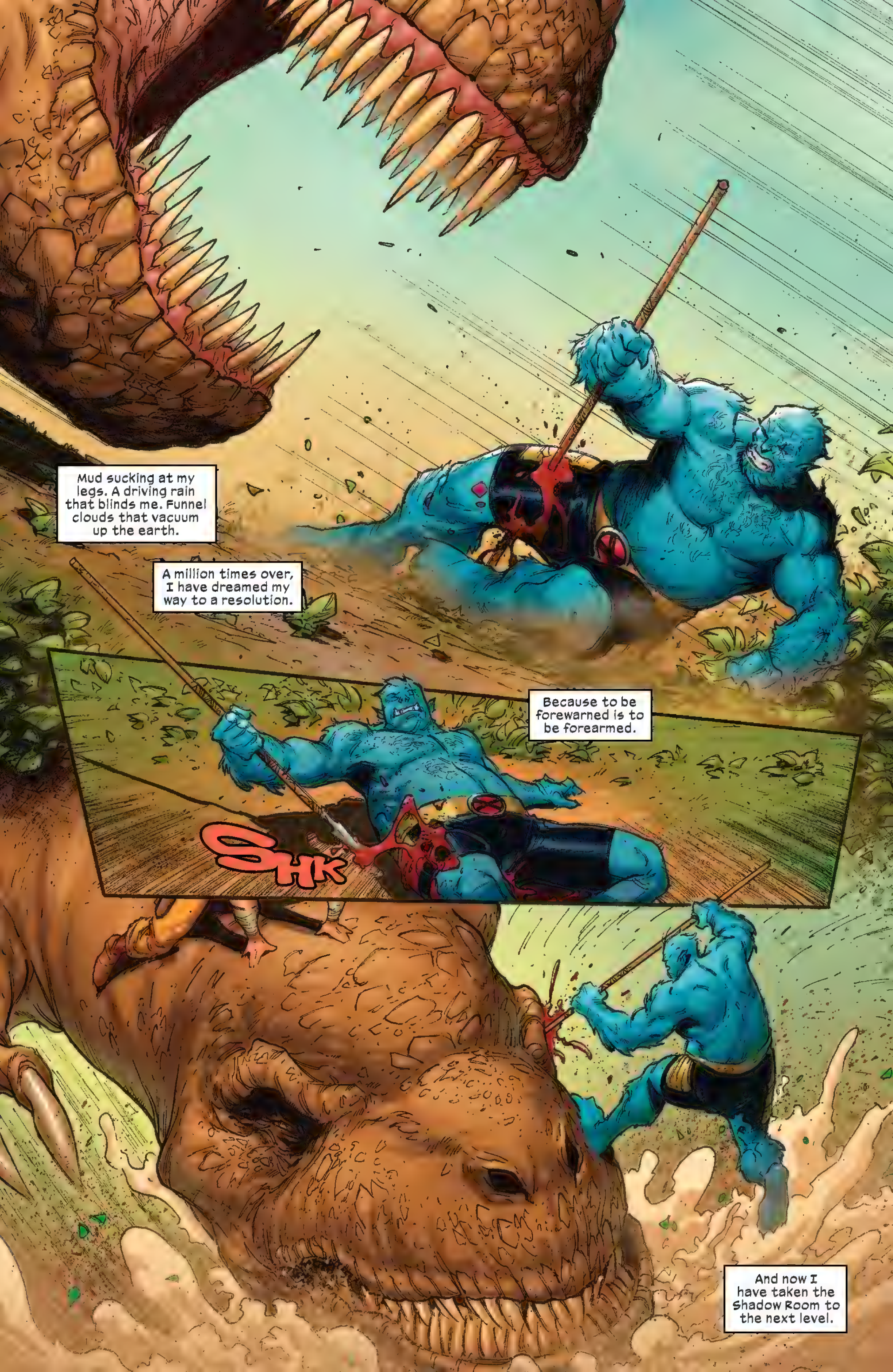

We must choose our hunting grounds.
SNIKT
SNIKT
The deadlier and more extreme... the better.
Or... wait...
I think I have an idea that will suit us nicely.
Yes. A truly primal environment.
A Savage Land for our savage games.
Not interested in your games.
Oh, but you don't have a choice.

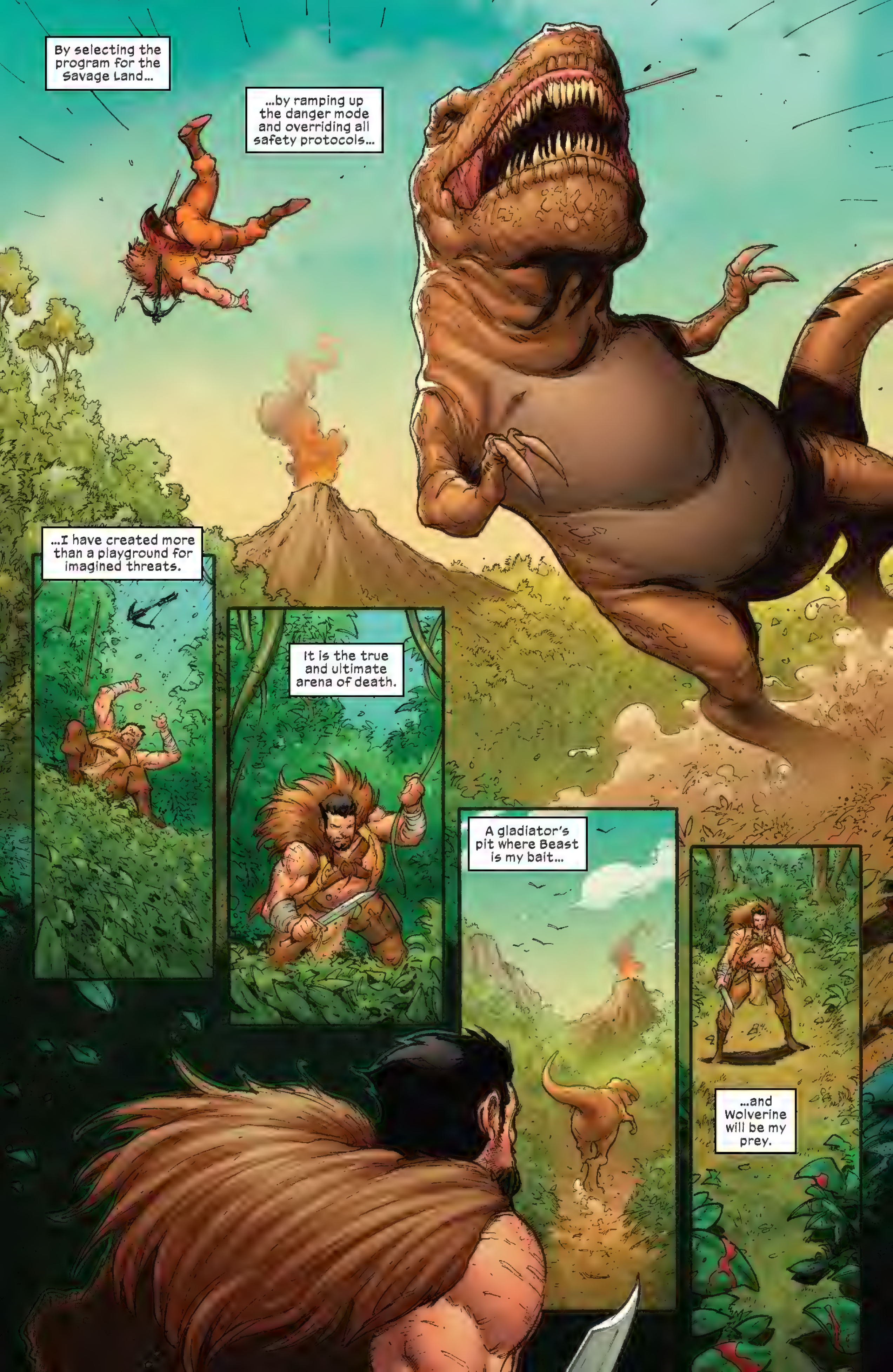

For now... your associate Beast is our game.
His hide will make a nice rug laid before the hearth of my hunting lodge.
Will you be able to stop me? Or the great reptiles that haunt this place?
Let the hunt begin.

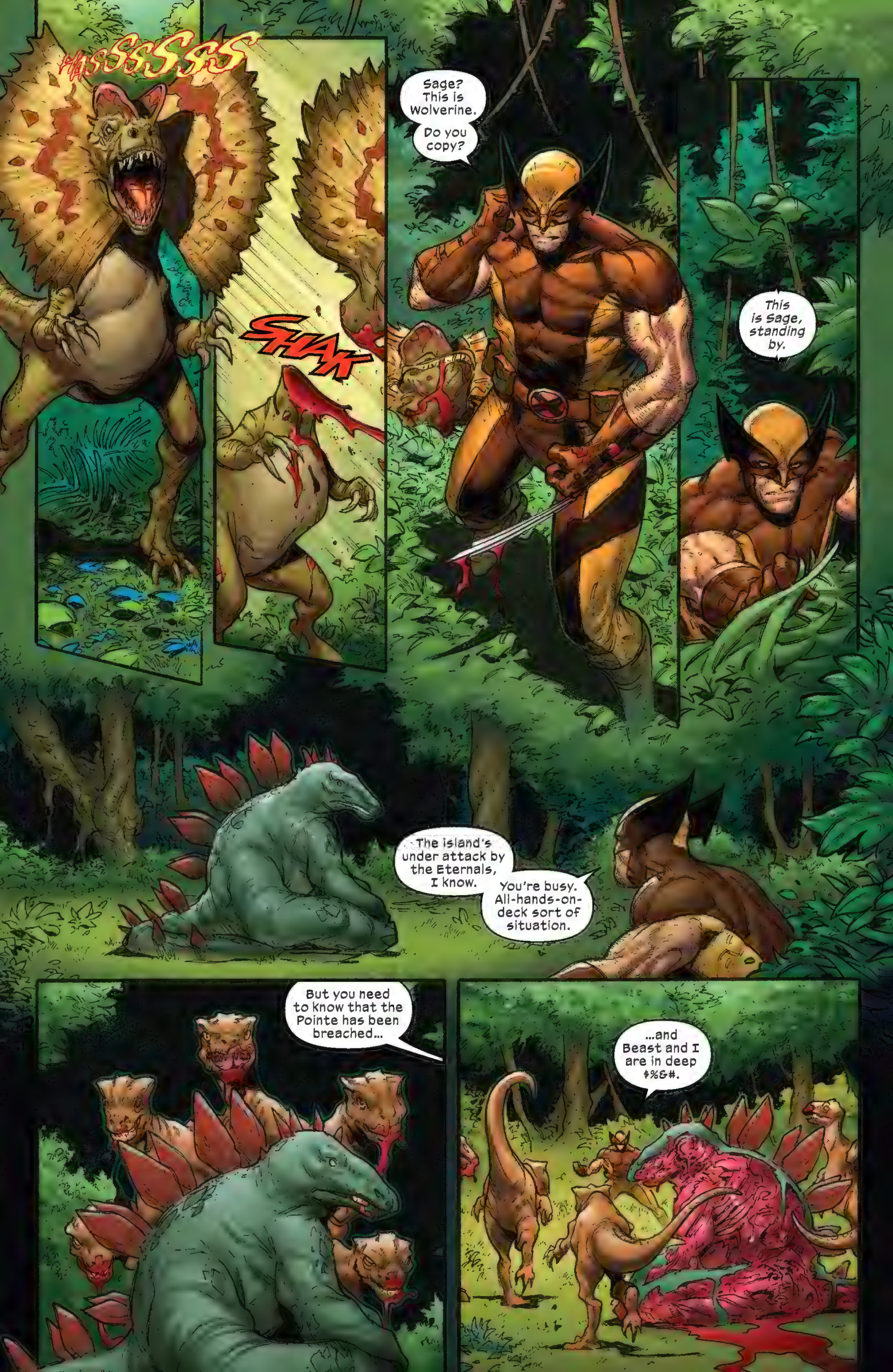
The Hunt for X Part 4: Memento Mori

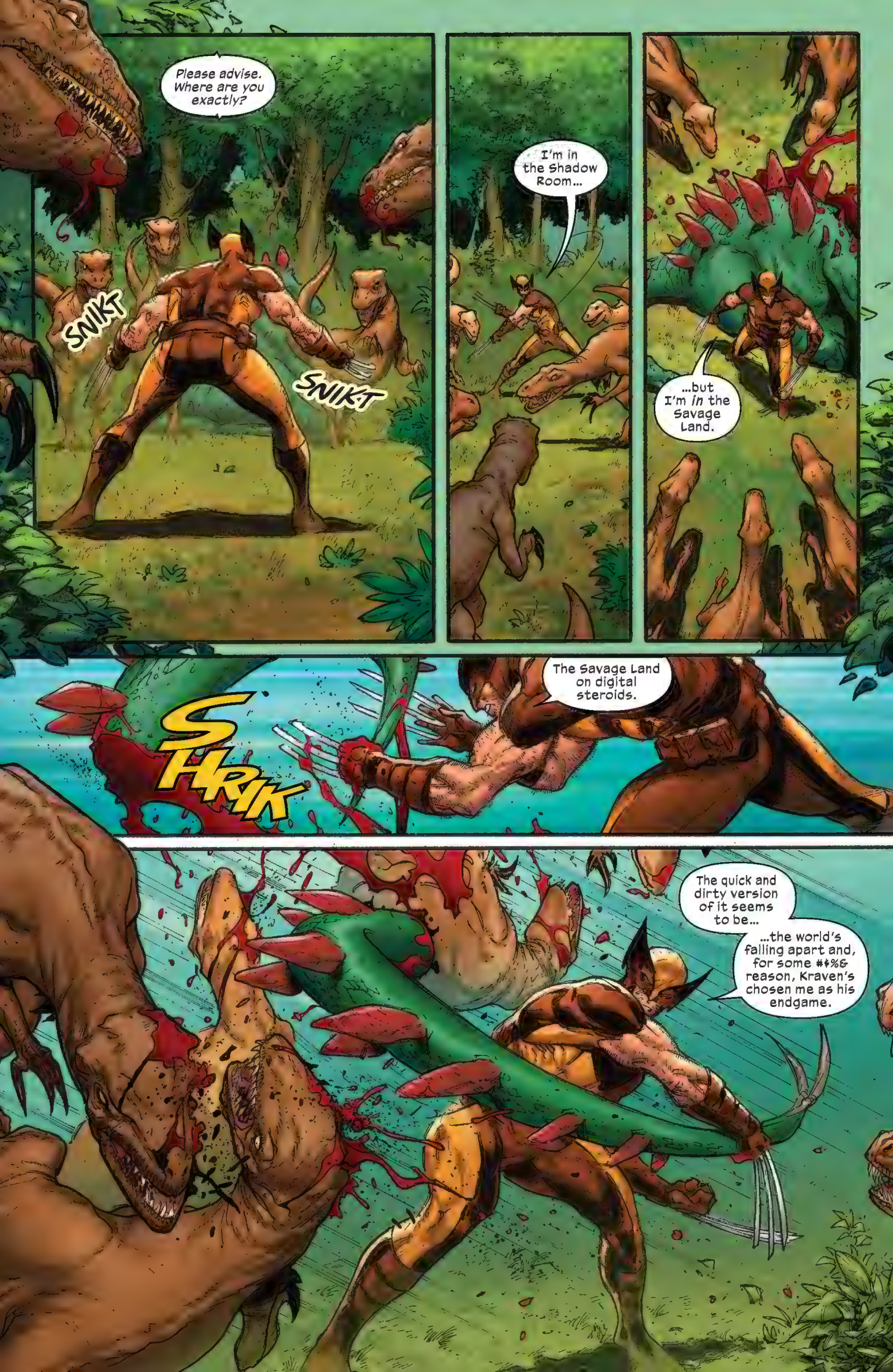
33

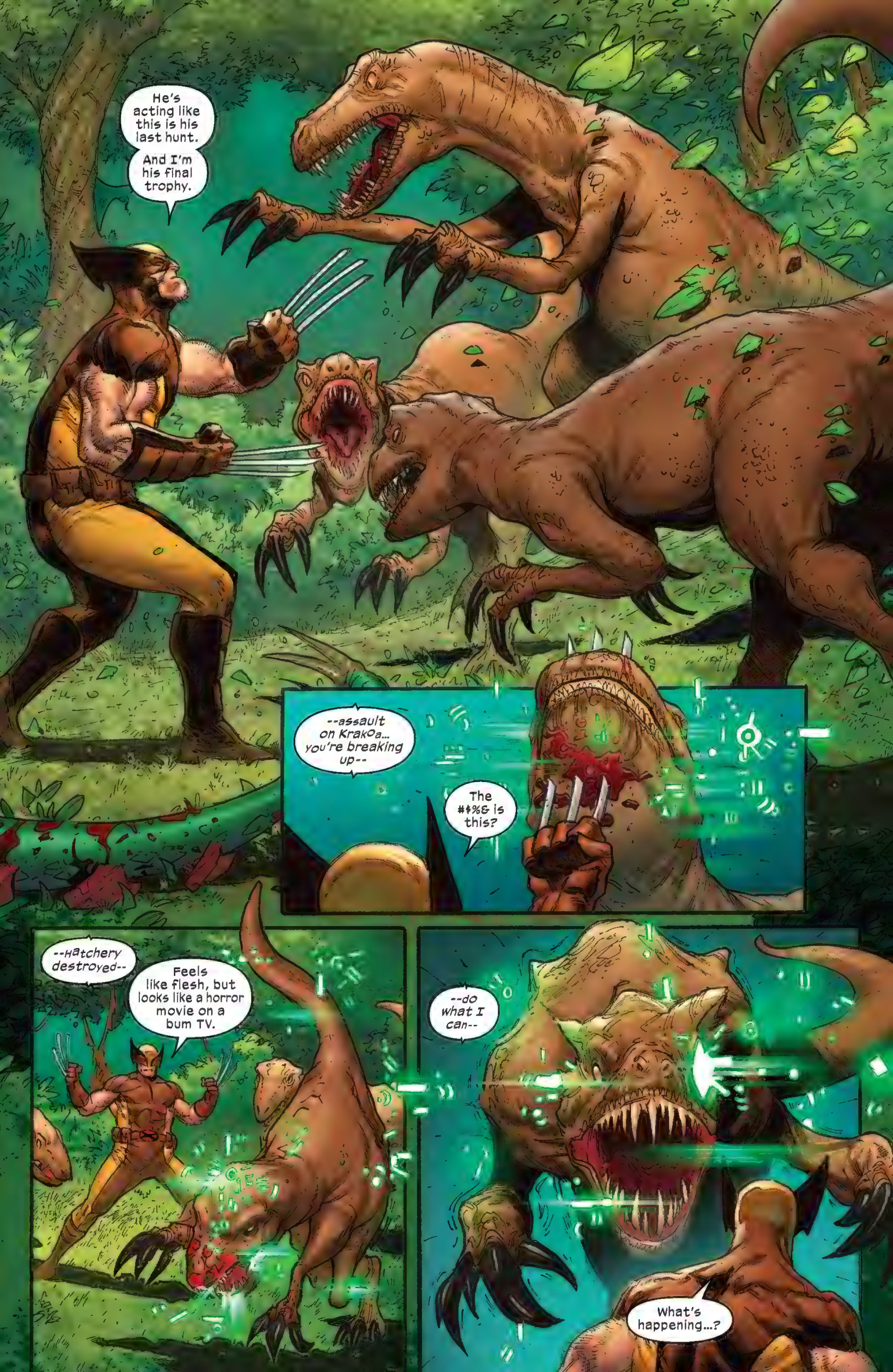

The mutants designed the Shadow Room to be a simulator.
X-Force would use it to test themselves against the world's darker elements.
When I learned this...
...I appreciated how my mind has always been a Shadow Room.
I am always prepping, training, studying, imagining every kind of assault.
The snarl of a wolf, the slash of a panther's paw, the stab of a rhino's horn.
THAKK
The blast of a gun, the bright flare of a laser.


Mud sucking at my legs. A driving rain that blinds me. Funnel clouds that vacuum up the earth.
A million times over, I have dreamed my way to a resolution.
Because to be forewarned is to be forearmed.
SHK
And now I have taken the Shadow Room to the next level.


By selecting the program for the Savage Land...
...by ramping up the danger mode and overriding all safety protocols...
...I have created more than a playground for imagined threats.
It is the true and ultimate arena of death.
A gladiator's pit where Beast is my bait...
...and Wolverine will be my prey.


HISSSSSSS
SHAK
Sage? This is Wolverine.
Do you copy?
This is Sage, standing by.
The island's under attack by the Eternals, I know.
You're busy. All-hands-on-deck sort of situation.
But you need to know that the Pointe has been breached...
...and Beast and I are in deep $%&#.


Please advise. Where are you exactly?
SNIKT
SNIKT
I'm in the Shadow Room...
...but I'm *in* the Savage Land.
SHRIK
The Savage Land on digital steroids.
The quick and dirty version of it seems to be...
...the world's falling apart and, for some #$%& reason, Kraven's chosen me as his endgame.


He's acting like this is his last hunt.
And I'm his final trophy.
--assault on Krakoa... you're breaking up--
The #$%& is this?
--Hatchery destroyed--
Feels like flesh, but looks like a horror movie on a bum TV.
--do what I can--
What's happening...?

and [unknown].

ALARM (2):

The security perimeter of the island has been breached. Threat identified as the Eternals.

ALARM (3):

Algorithmic media scans indicate a global crisis with potentially devastating effects on the population and the market. Threat identified as the Progenitor.

--auto notification(s)--

*****immediate action required*****

ALARM (1):

The Incursion Defense Program [Shadow Room] has been activated. All safety programs are canceled out. The hard-light installations will kill all intruding biomatter. Victim(s) identified as Beast, Wolverine and [unknown].

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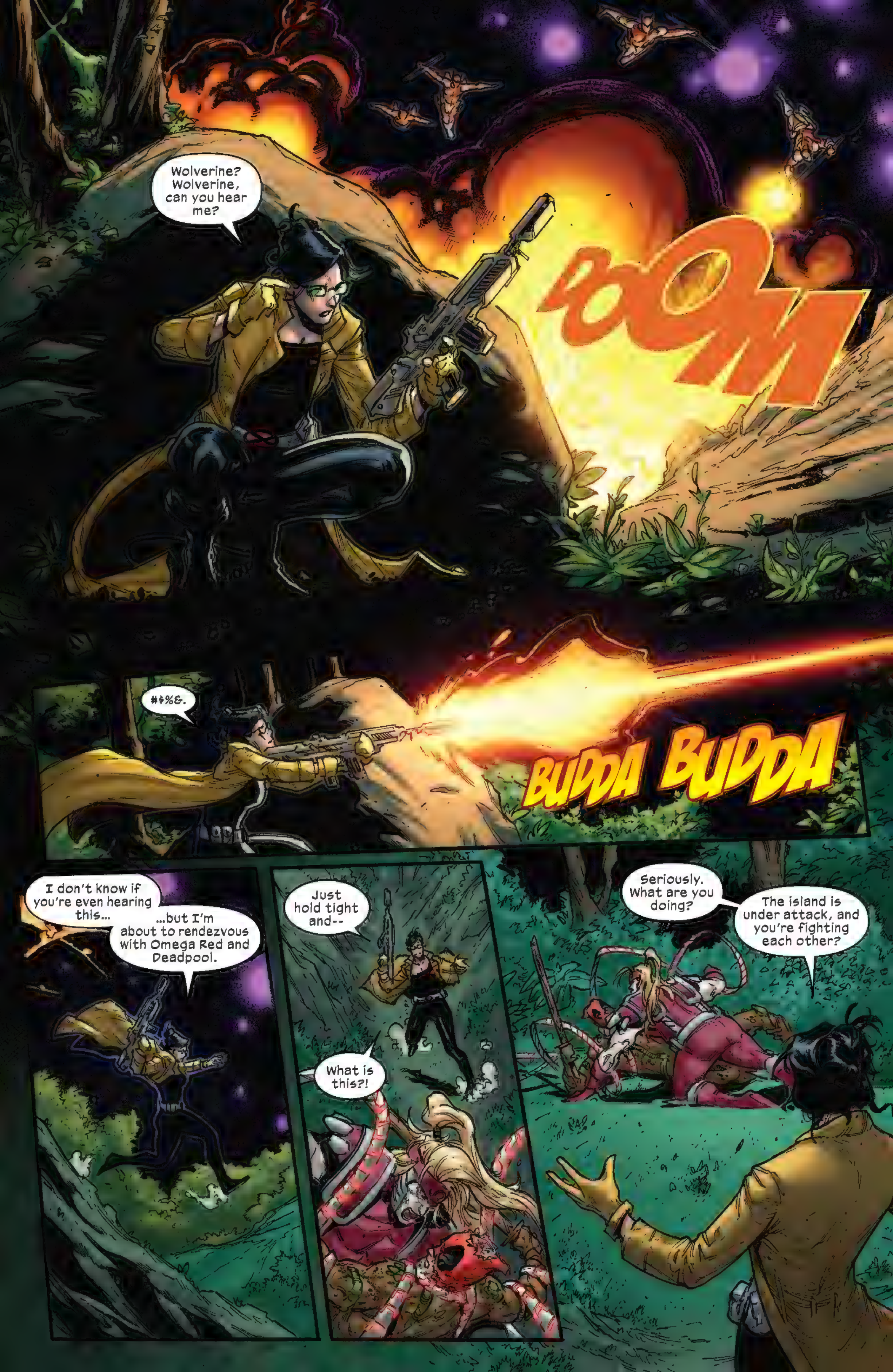
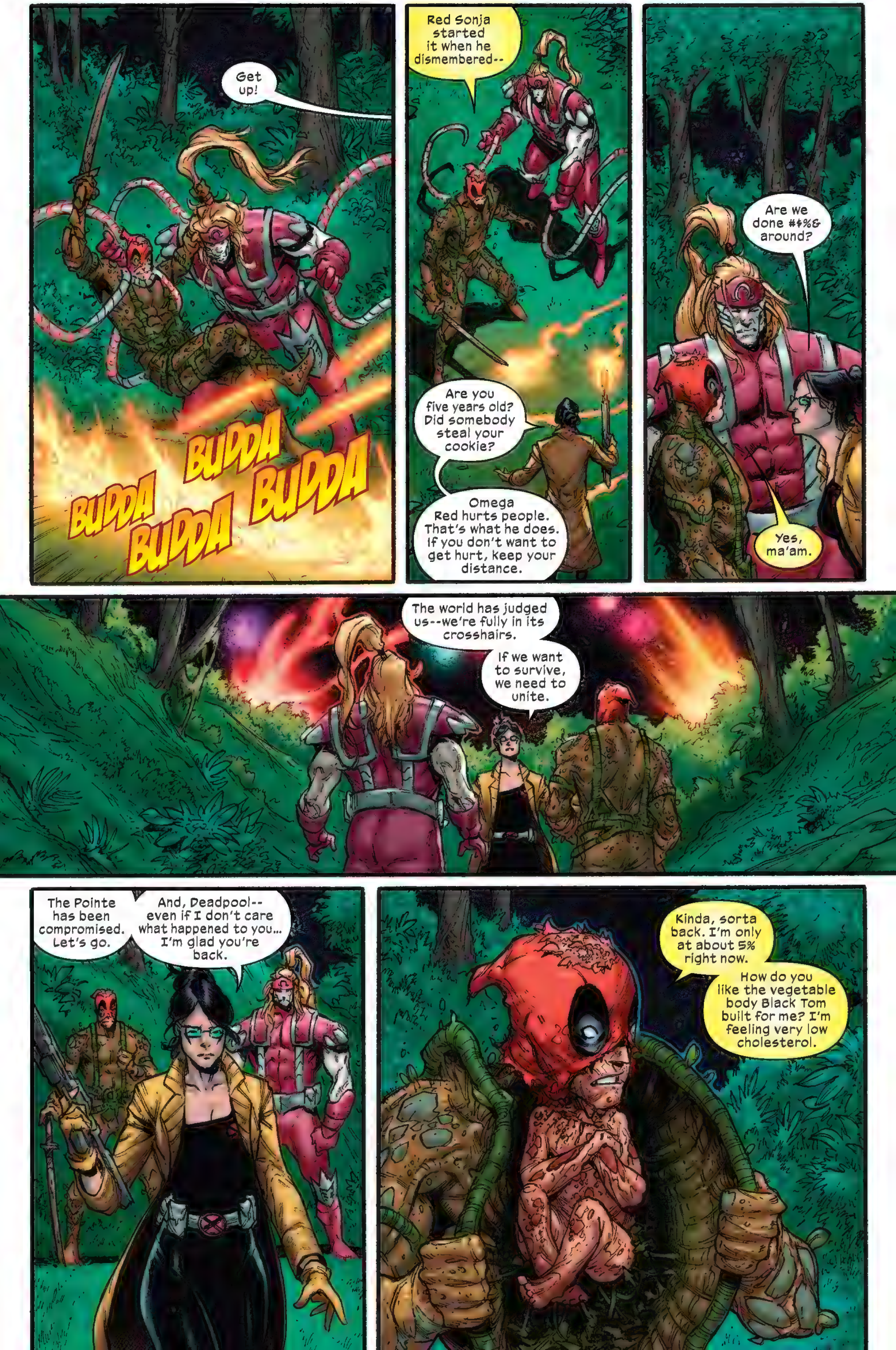
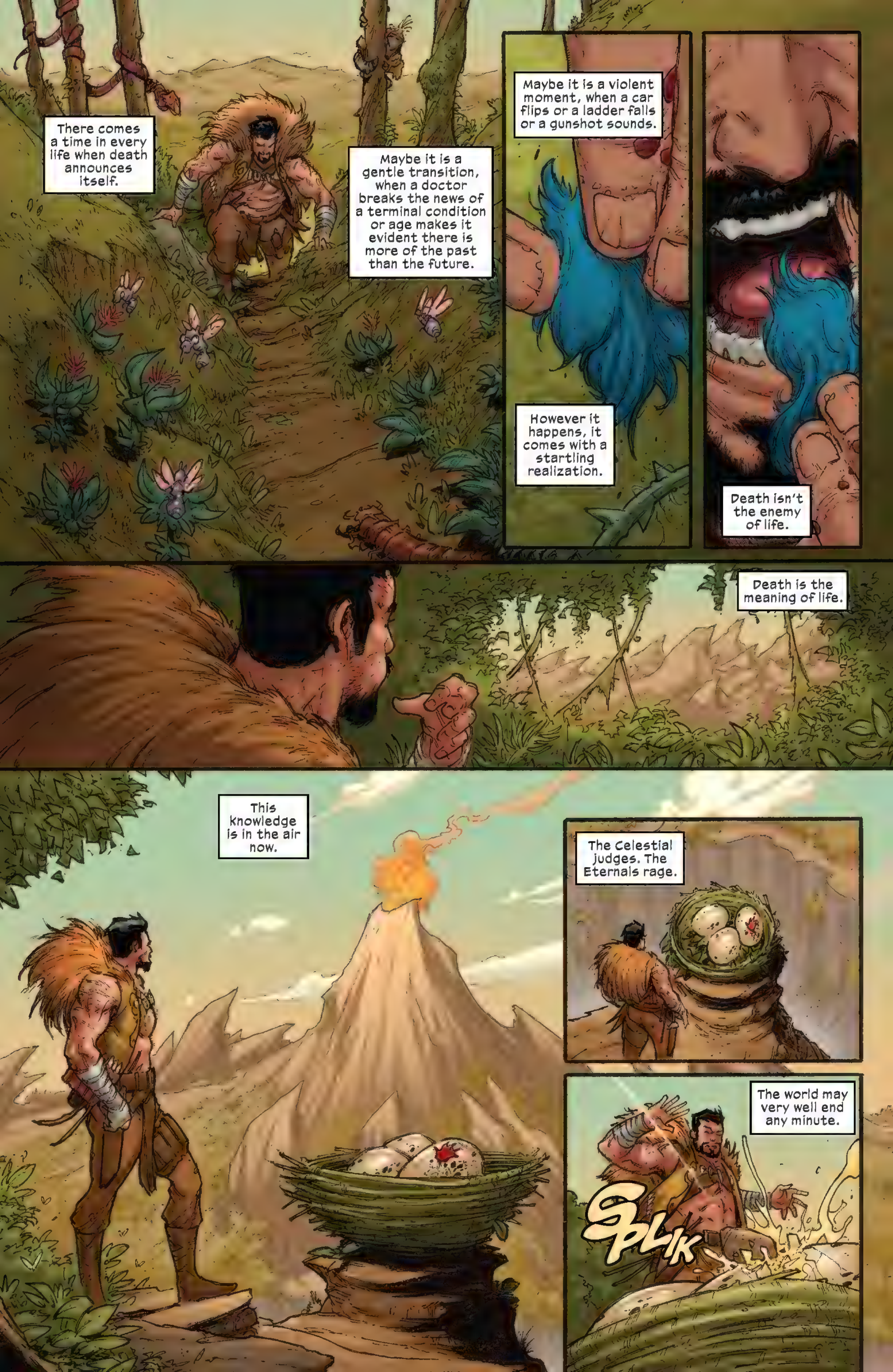
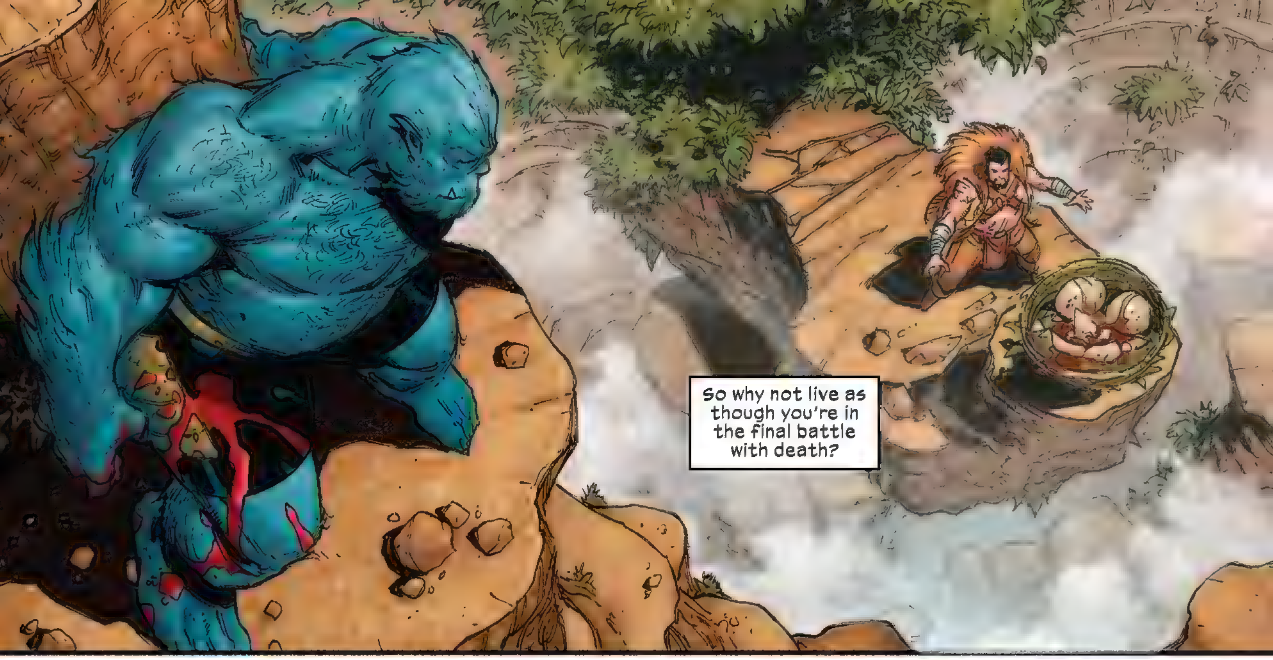
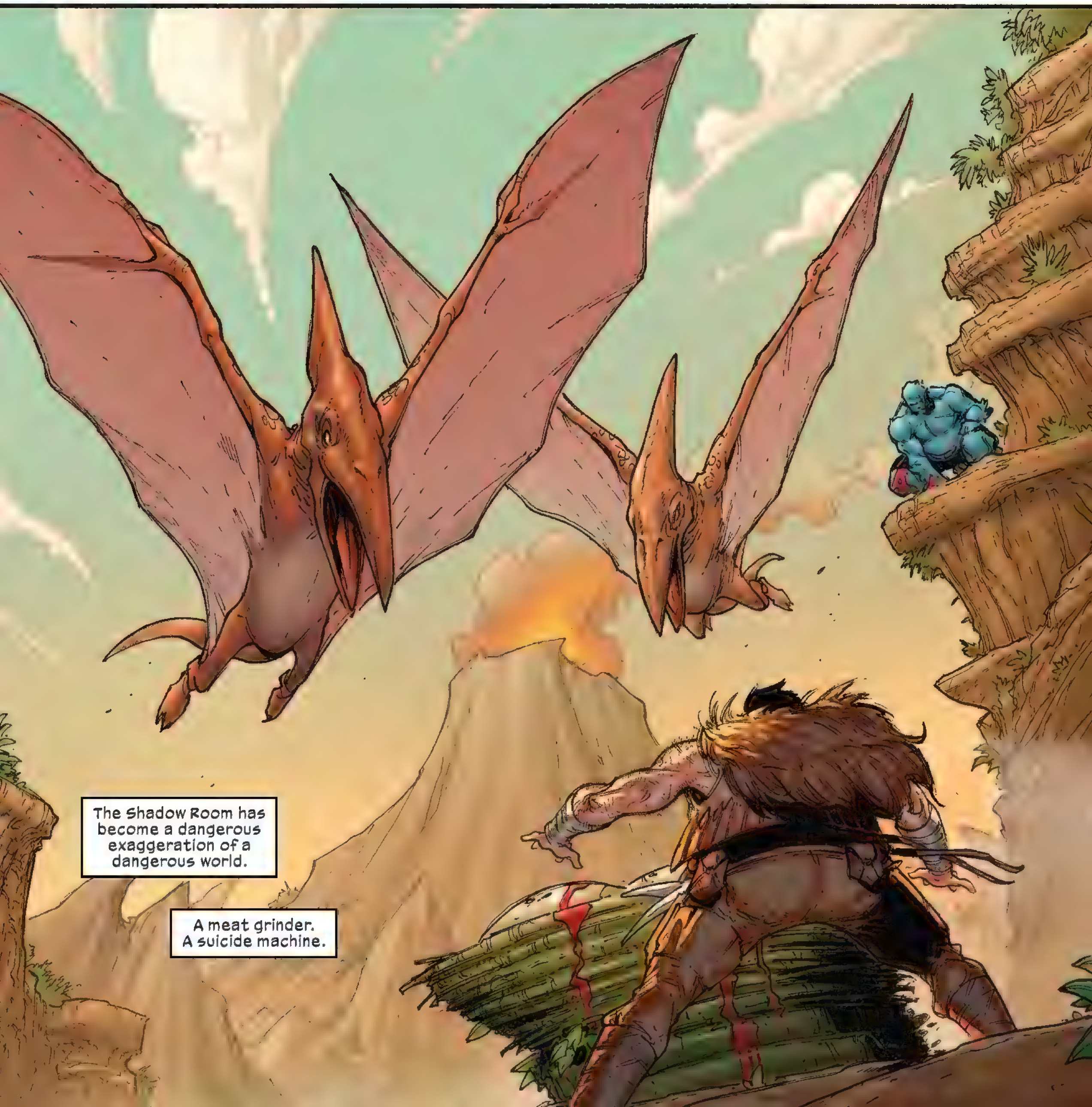
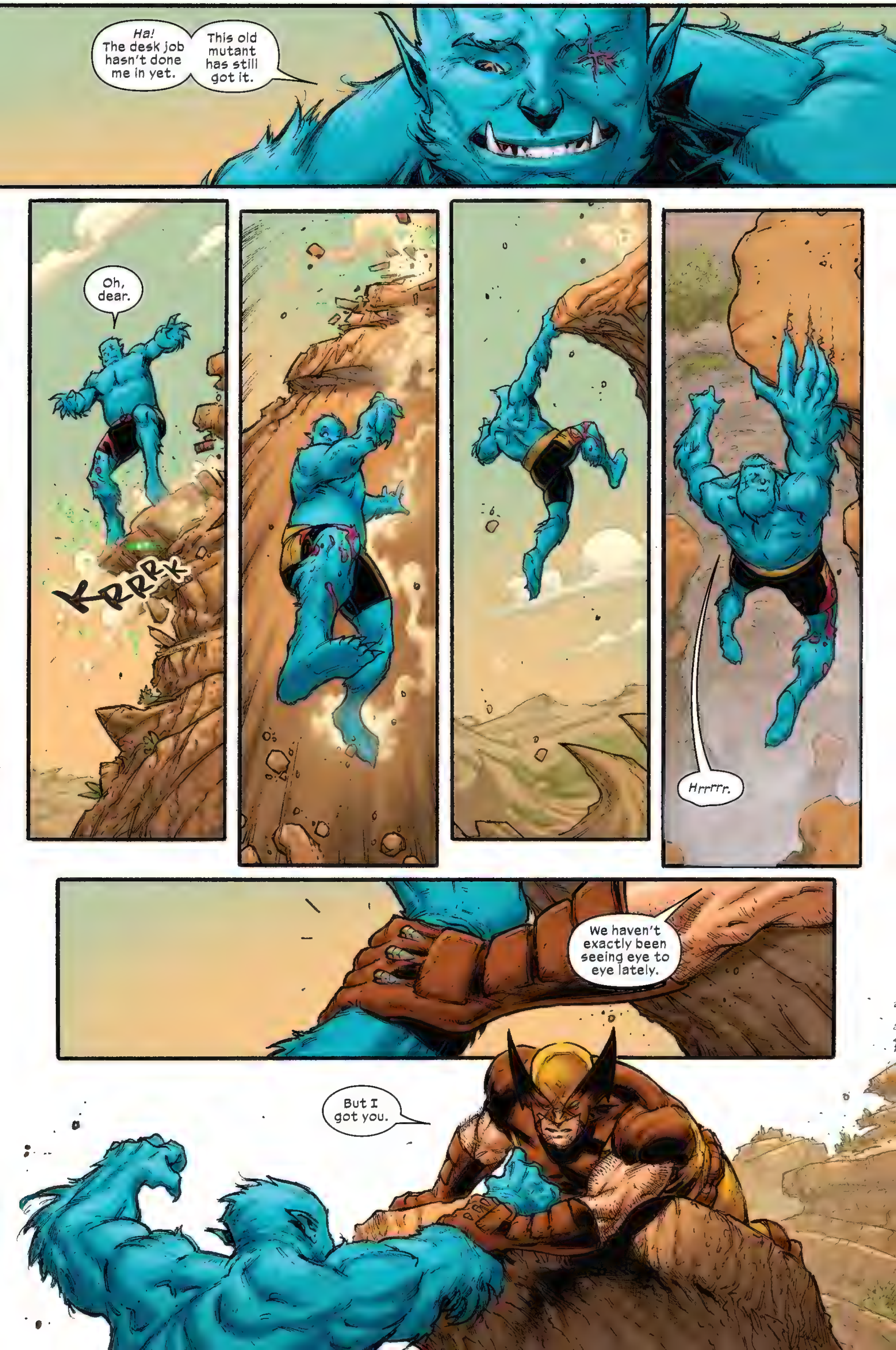

Wolverine? Wolverine, can you hear me?
BOOM
#$%&.
BUDDA BUDDA
I don't know if you're even hearing this...
...but I'm about to rendezvous with Omega Red and Deadpool.
Just hold tight and--
What is this?!
Seriously. What are you doing?
The island is under attack, and you're fighting each other?

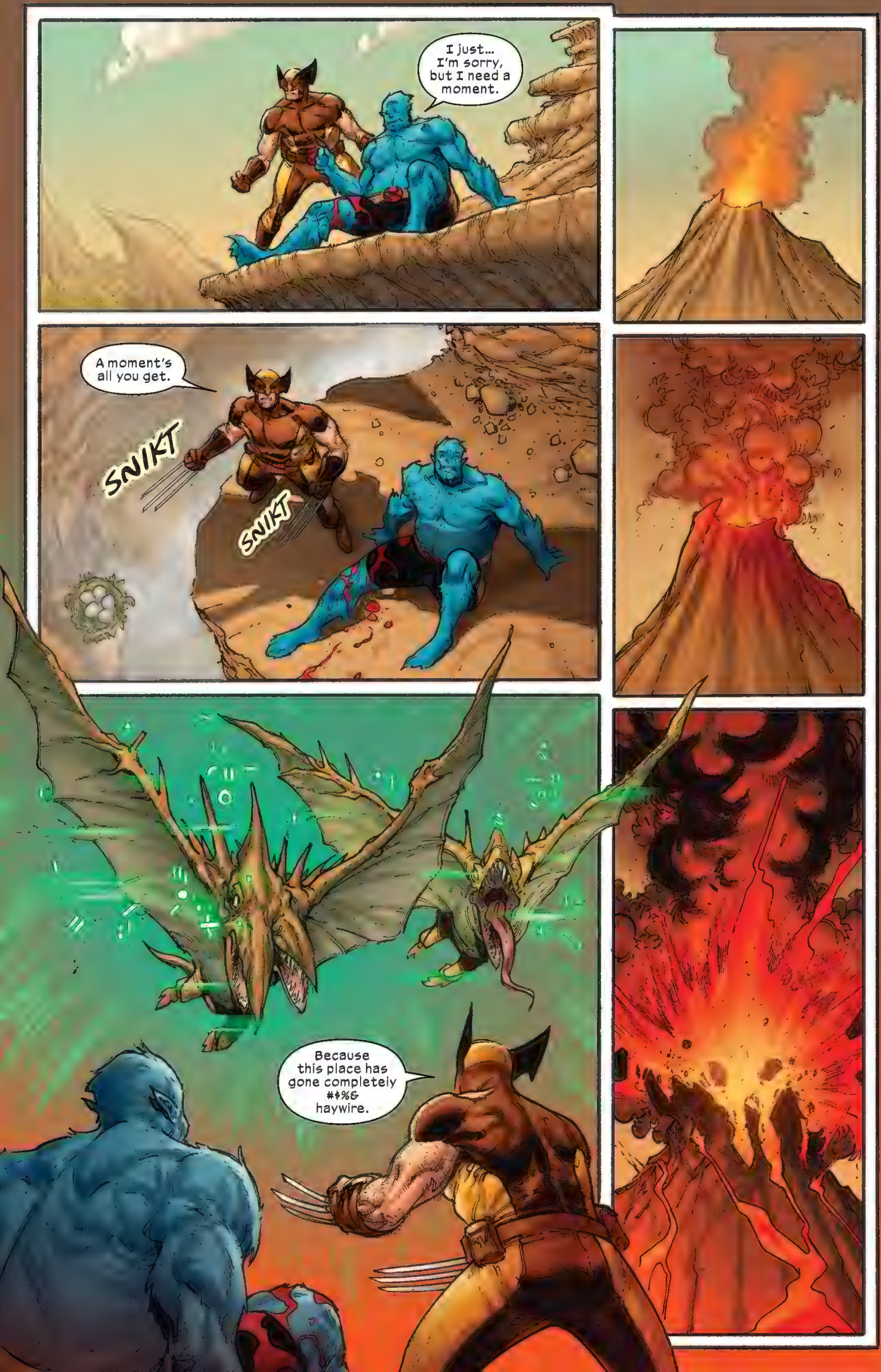

Get up!
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
Red Sonja started it when he dismembered--
Are you five years old? Did somebody steal your cookie?
Omega Red hurts people. That's what he does. If you don't want to get hurt, keep your distance.
Are we done #$%& around?
Yes, ma'am.
The world has judged us--we're fully in its crosshairs.
If we want to survive, we need to unite.
The Pointe has been compromised. Let's go.
And, Deadpool-- even if I don't care what happened to you... I'm glad you're back.
Kinda, sorta back. I'm only at about 5% right now.
How do you like the vegetable body Black Tom built for me? I'm feeling very low cholesterol.

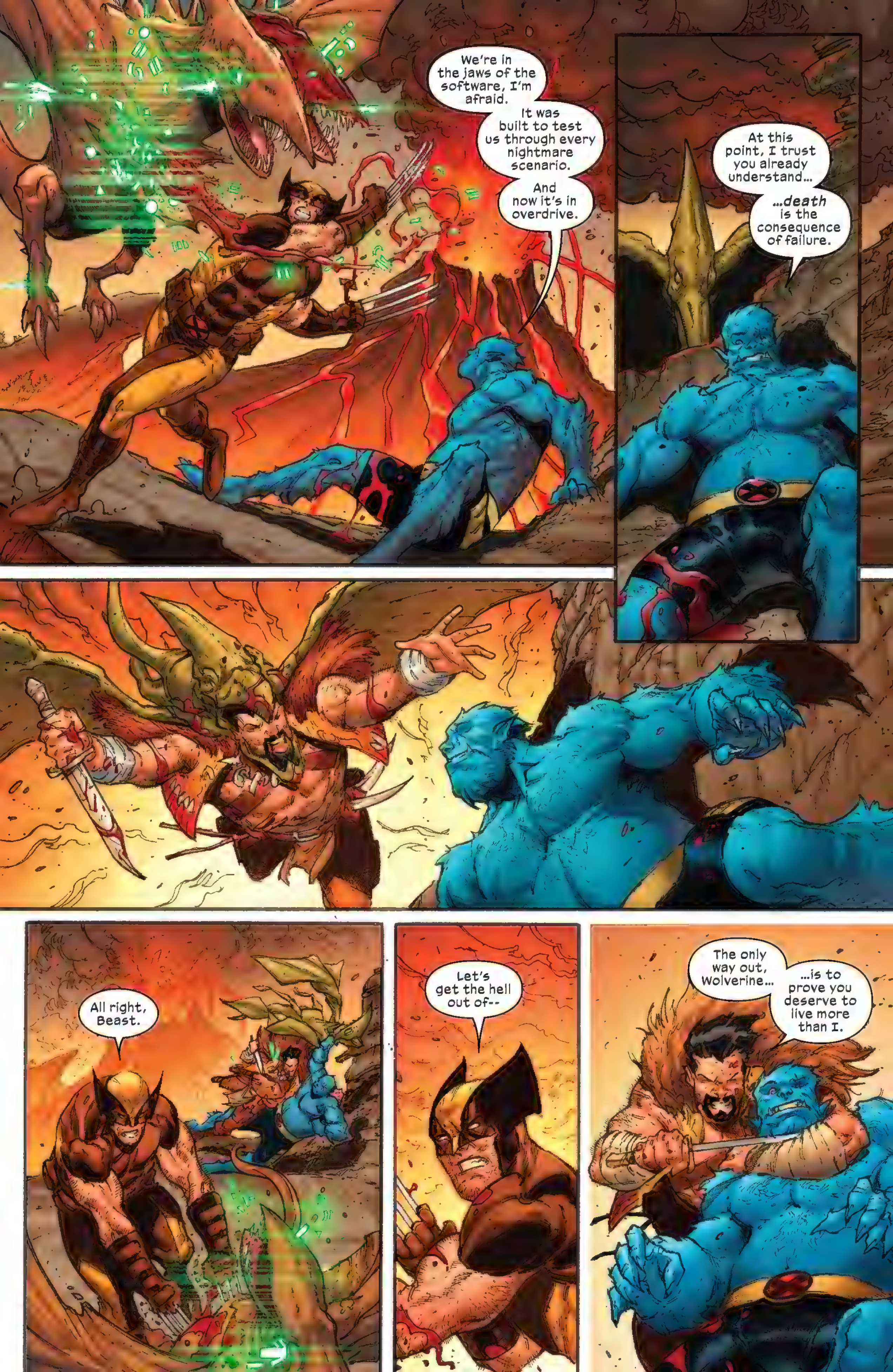

There comes a time in every life when death announces itself.
Maybe it is a gentle transition, when a doctor breaks the news of a terminal condition or age makes it evident there is more of the past than the future.
Maybe it is a violent moment, when a car flips or a ladder falls or a gunshot sounds.
However it happens, it comes with a startling realization.
Death isn't the enemy of life.
Death is the meaning of life.
This knowledge is in the air now.
The Celestial judges. The Eternals rage.
The world may very well end any minute.
SPLIK

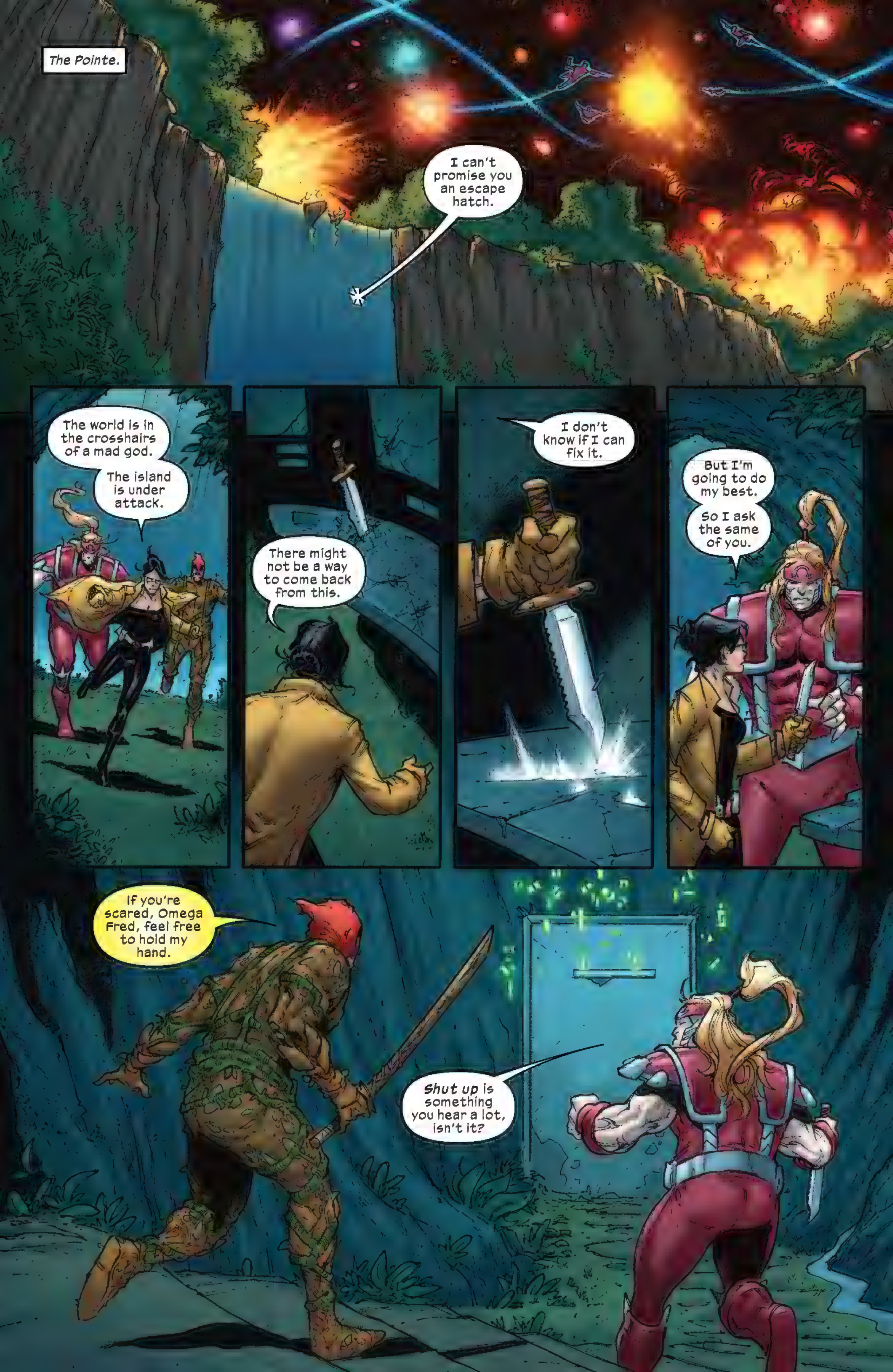

So why not live as though you're in the final battle with death?

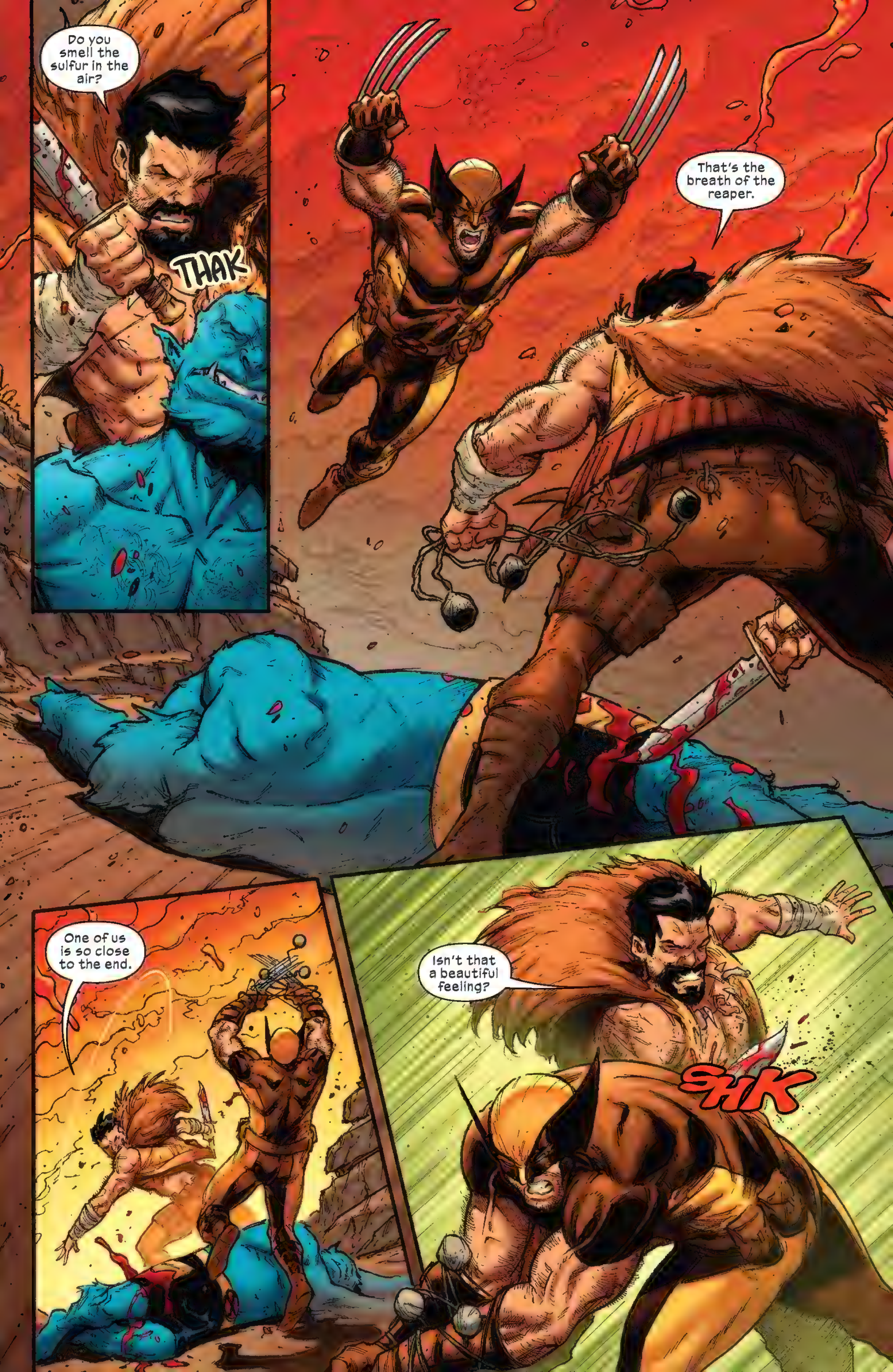

The Shadow Room has become a dangerous exaggeration of a dangerous world.
A meat grinder. A suicide machine.

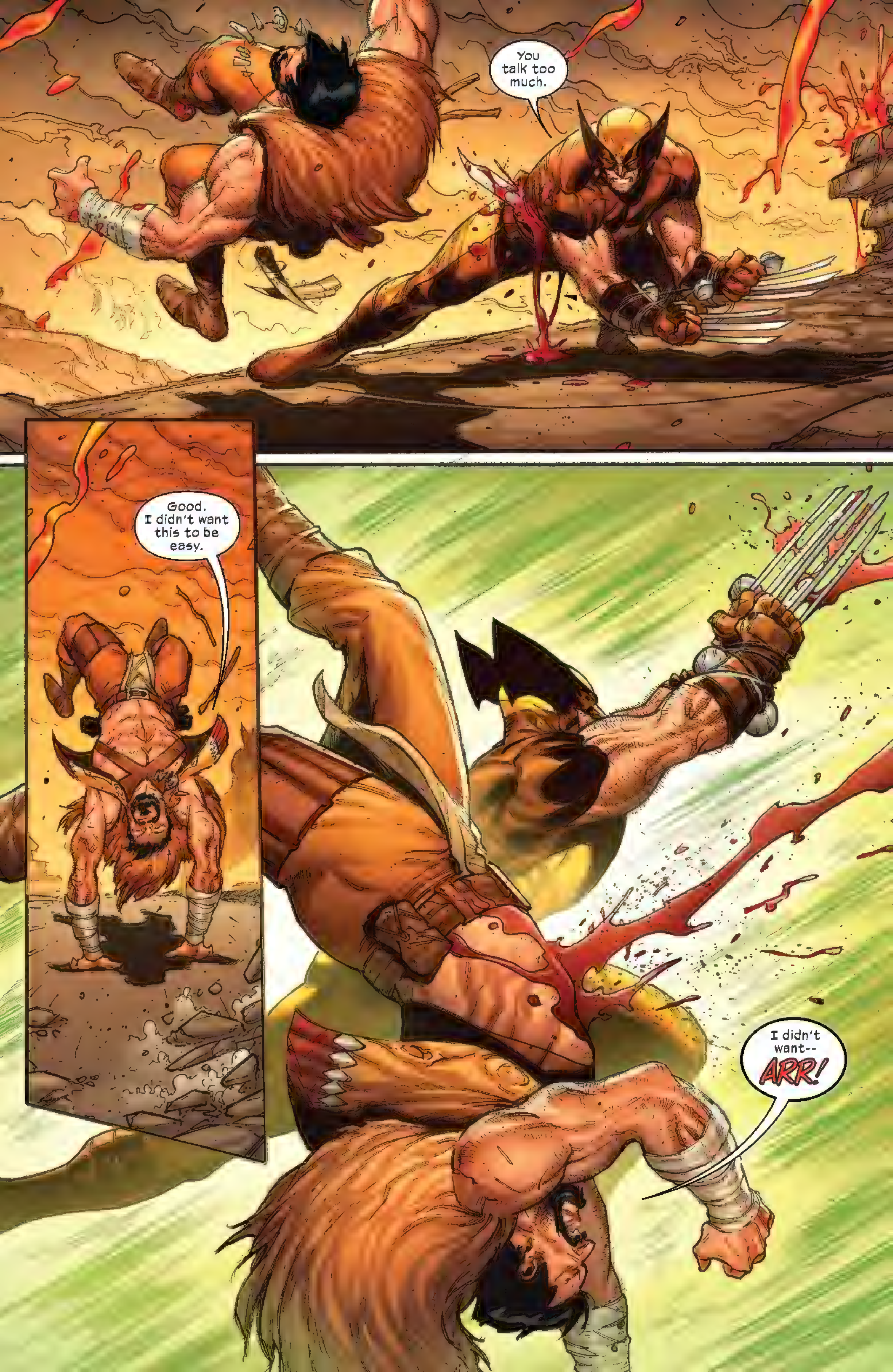

Ha! The desk job hasn't done me in yet.
This old mutant has still got it.
Oh, dear.
KRRRK
Hrrrrr.
We haven't exactly been seeing eye to eye lately.
But I got you.

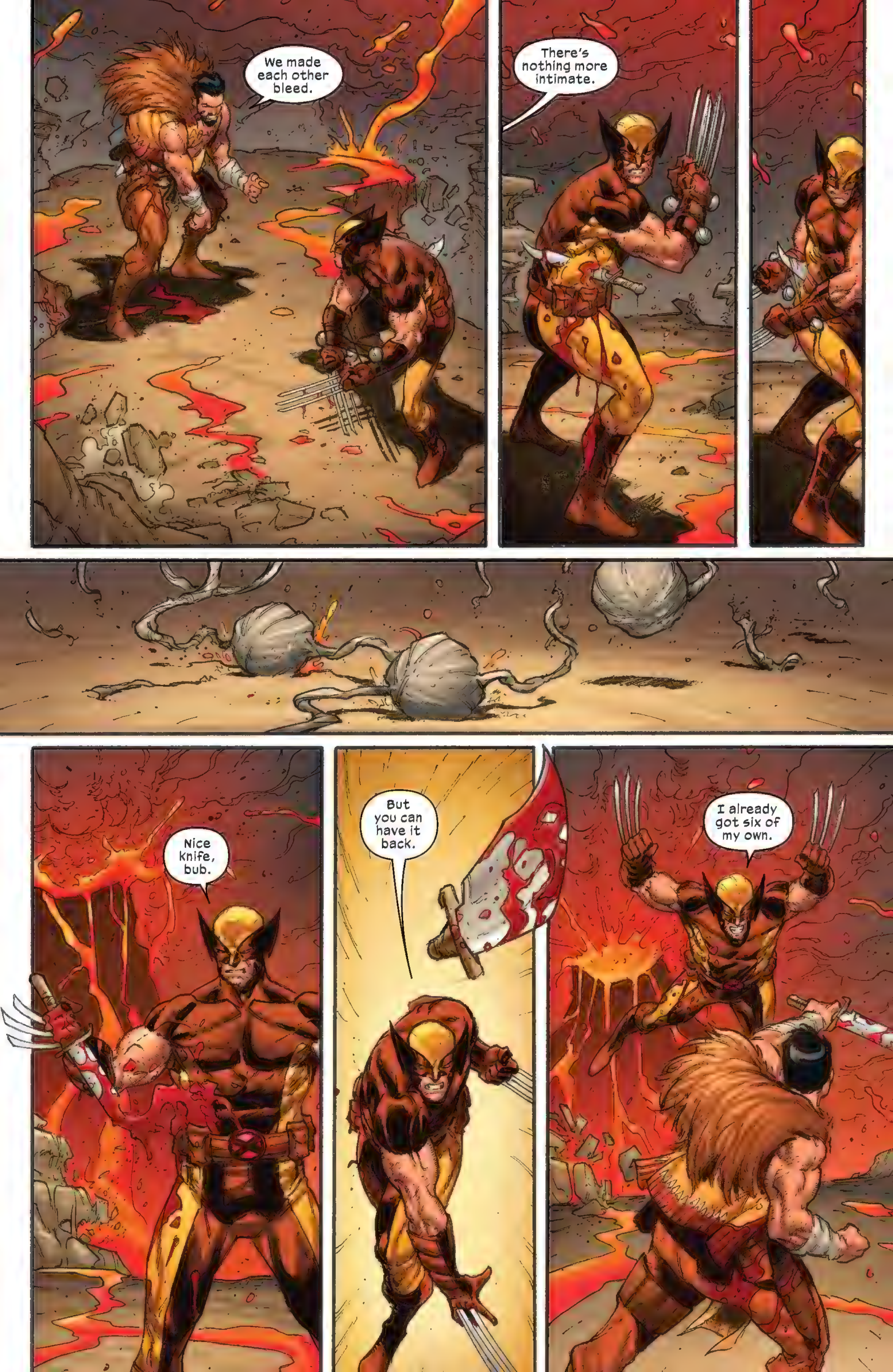

I just... I'm sorry, but I need a moment.
A moment's all you get.
SNIKT
SNIKT
Because this place has gone completely #$%& haywire.

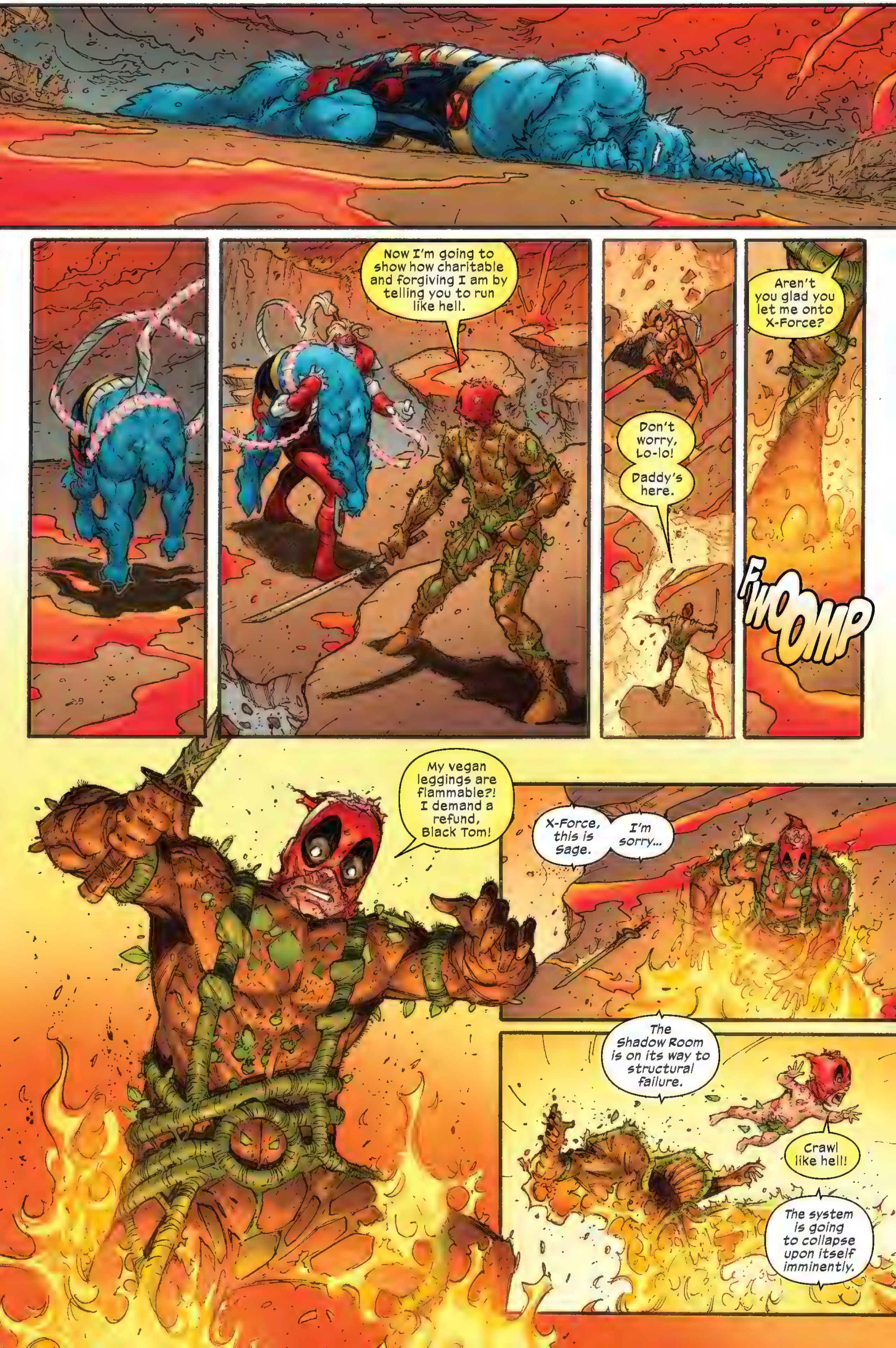

We're in the jaws of the software, I'm afraid.
It was built to test us through every nightmare scenario.
And now it's in overdrive.
At this point, I trust you already understand...
...*death* is the consequence of failure.
All right, Beast.
Let's get the hell out of--
The only way out, Wolverine...
...is to prove you deserve to live more than I.

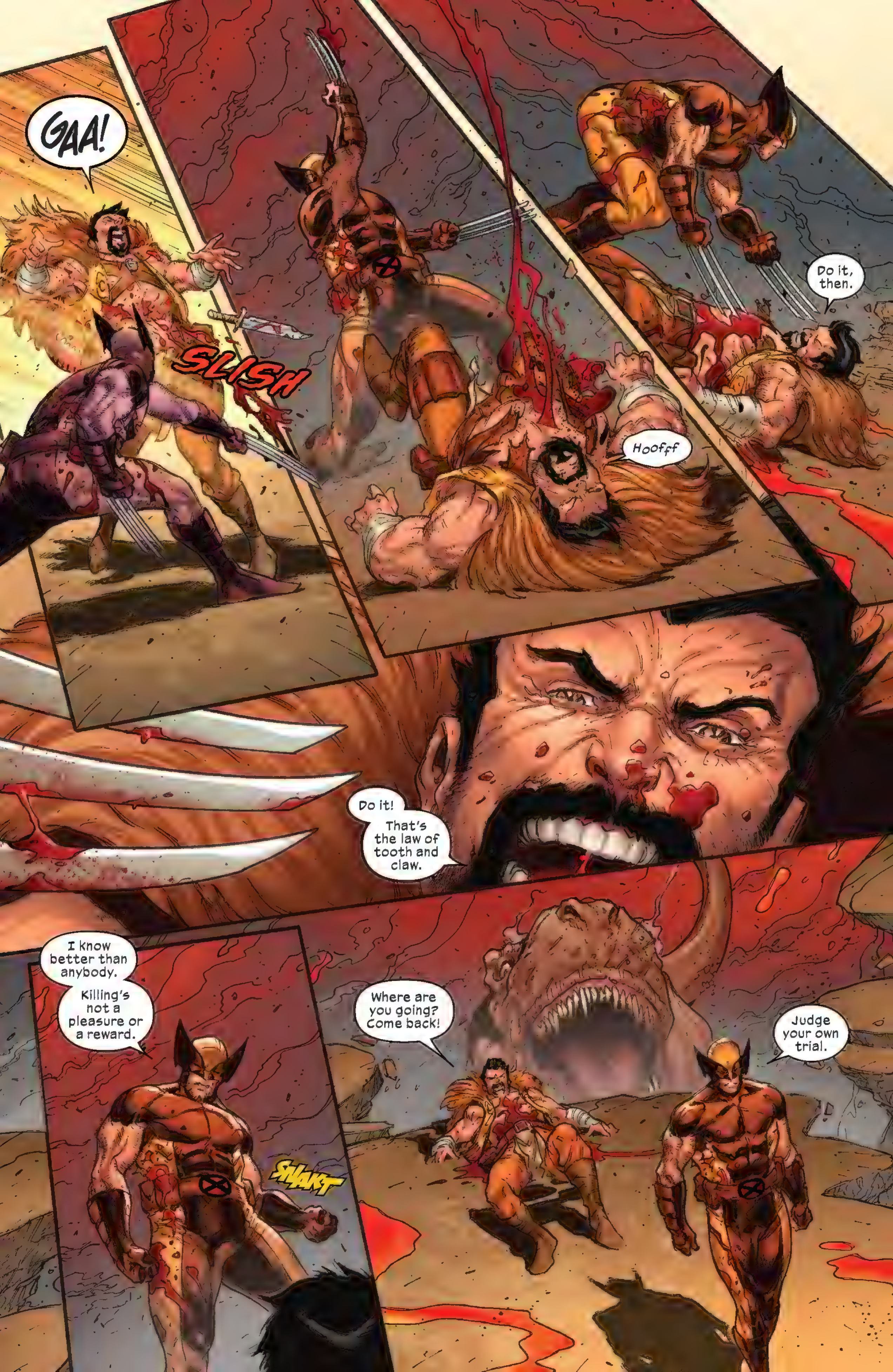

The Pointe.
I can't promise you an escape hatch.
The world is in the crosshairs of a mad god.
The island is under attack.
There might not be a way to come back from this.
I don't know if I can fix it.
But I'm going to do my best.
So I ask the same of you.
If you're scared, Omega Fred, feel free to hold my hand.
Shut up is something you hear a lot, isn't it?

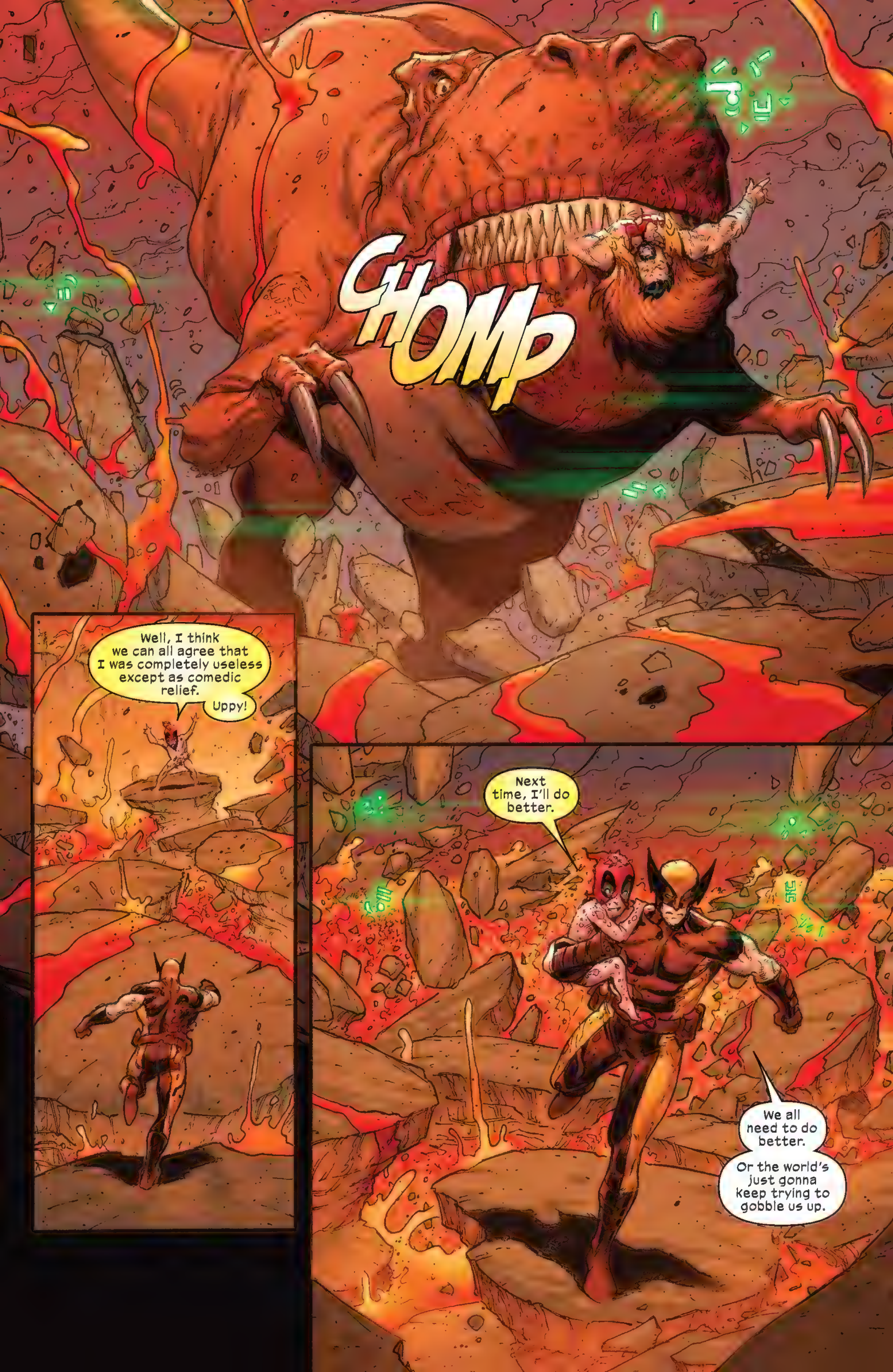

Do you smell the sulfur in the air?
THAK
That's the breath of the reaper.
One of us is so close to the end.
Isn't that a beautiful feeling?
SHK


You talk too much.
Good. I didn't want this to be easy.
I didn't want-- ARR!


We made each other bleed.
There's nothing more intimate.
Nice knife, bub.
But you can have it back.
I already got six of my own.


Now I'm going to show how charitable and forgiving I am by telling you to run like hell.
Don't worry, Lo-lo!
Daddy's here.
Aren't you glad you let me onto X-Force?
FWOOMP
My vegan leggings are flammable?! I demand a refund, Black Tom!
X-Force, this is Sage.
I'm sorry...
The Shadow Room is on its way to structural failure.
Crawl like hell!
The system is going to collapse upon itself imminently.


GAA!
SLISH
Hoofff
Do it, then.
Do it!
That's the law of tooth and claw.
I know better than anybody.
Killing's not a pleasure or a reward.
SNAKT
Where are you going? Come back!
Judge your own trial.


CHOMP
Well, I think we can all agree that I was completely useless except as comedic relief.
Uppy!
Next time, I'll do better.
We all need to do better.
Or the world's just gonna keep trying to gobble us up.

[wolve...........[0.0]
[rine..............[0.0]

“All around the world, people are gathering at our gates. They make protest signs. They chant and beg and pray and shout. Because they want what we got. The ability to come back. On the one hand, can’t blame them. On the other, they’re better off without.

“Security makes you soft. Comfort makes you lazy. You don’t grow. You take $%&^ for granted. What does it mean to live forever if you ain’t really living?

“I look around at this island, and I can’t help but think Kraven... the Eternals...the Progenitor’s judgment...all of it might’ve been just the kick in the ass everybody needed. Because suddenly they realized all this might be gone.

“That’s a bite of the apple right there. Here they are, living in the garden of plenty, and a snake’s suddenly whispering some good darkness in their ear. Go ahead and weep for what you’ve learned, mutants. I’m glad to see your tears.

“I think that’s why Kraven came. Those of us who are bathed in blood understand each other. He didn’t like what he saw and he meant to rectify it.

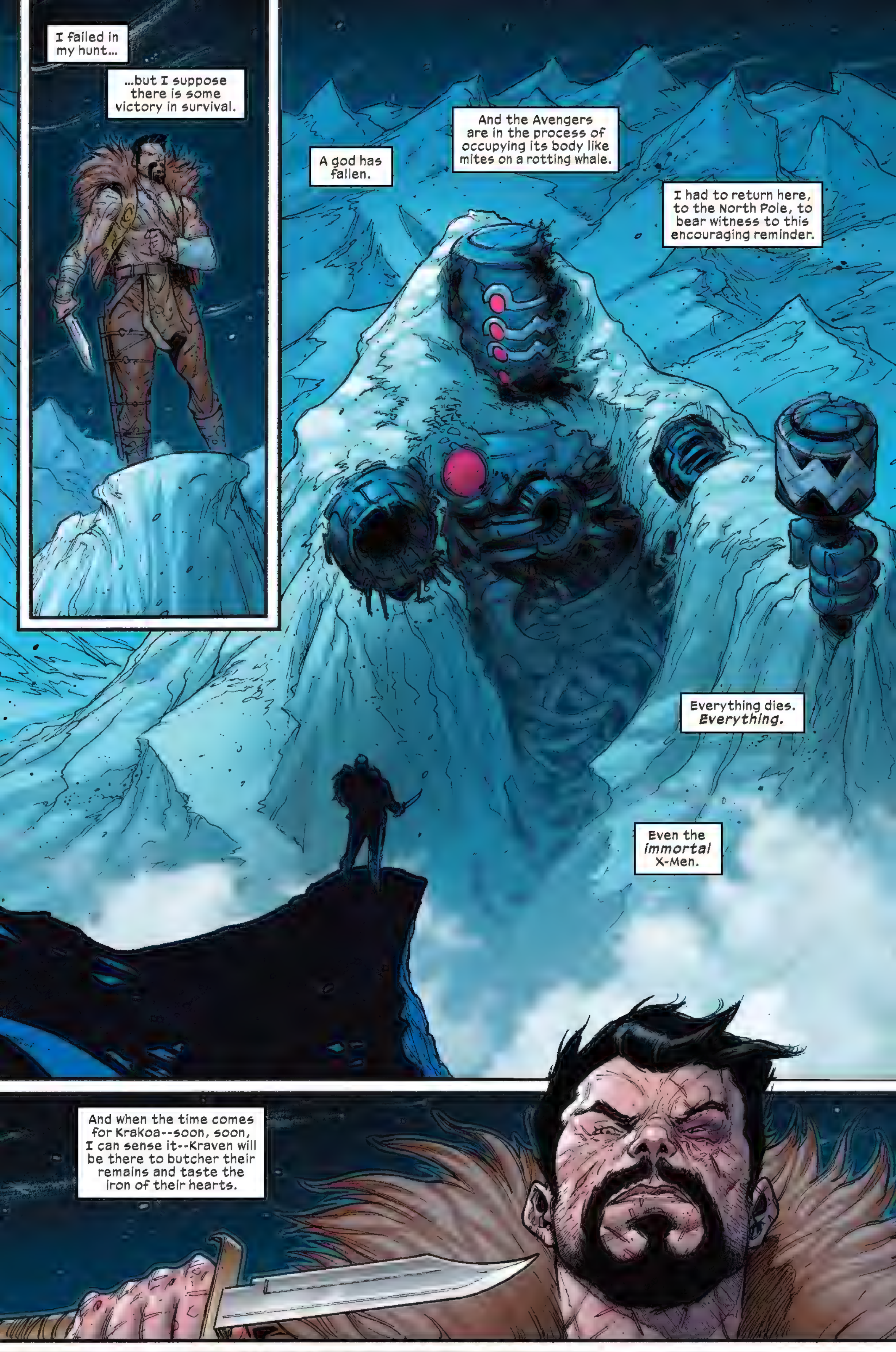
“Not long after I made it out of the Shadow Room, it short-circuited and collapsed. We tried digging Kraven up, but his body was nowhere to be found. I was glad. I like the idea of him out there, same as I like the idea of sharks cutting through the deep and crocodiles soaking in the swamp and bears shambling around in the woods. They keep you looking over your shoulder, and when you’re looking over your shoulder, you’re valuing your life.”

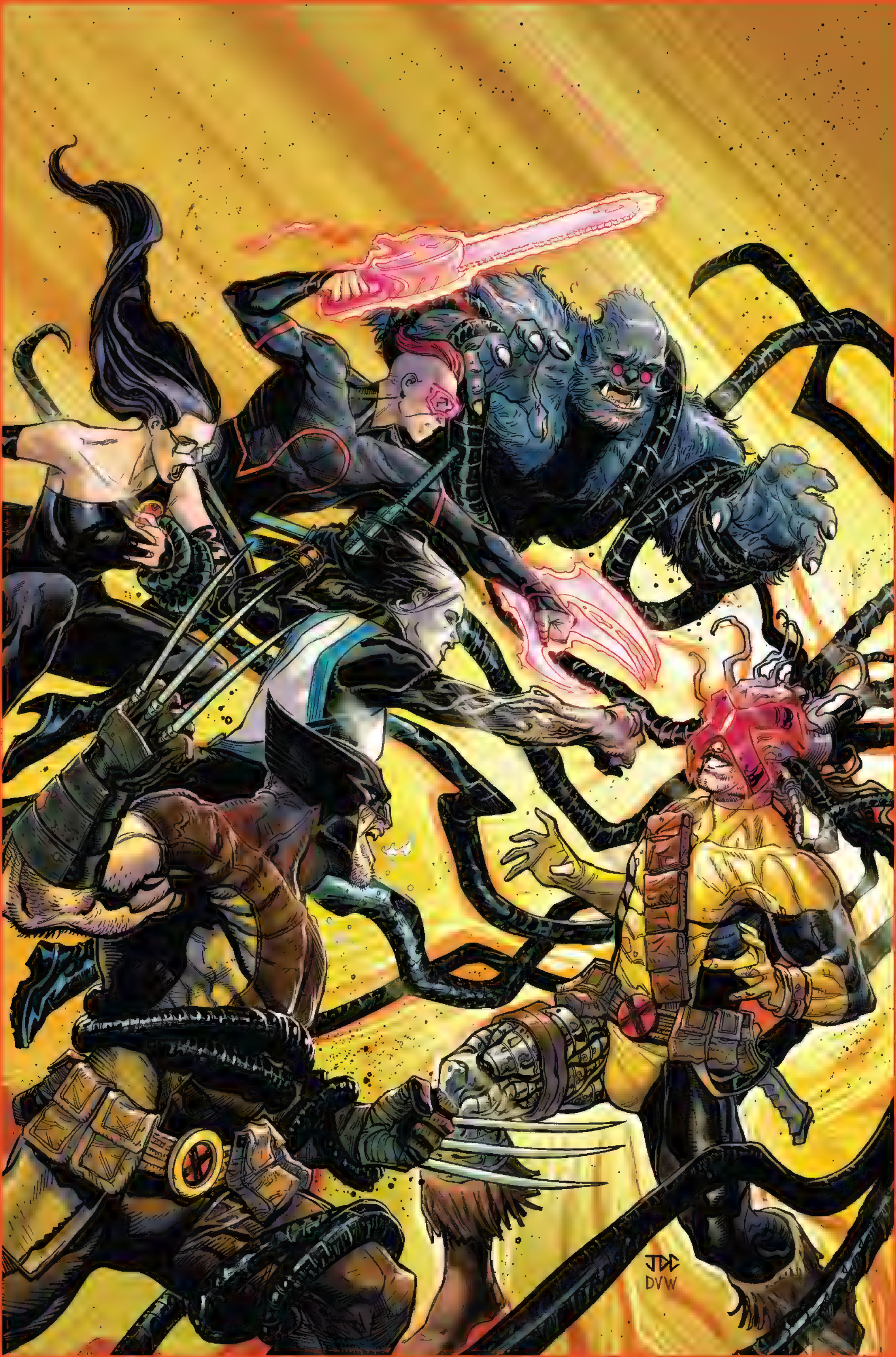
-- WOLVERINE (LOGAN)

“Why is it that when you drink, you either want to fight or get obnoxiously philosophical?”

-- WOLVERINE (LAURA)

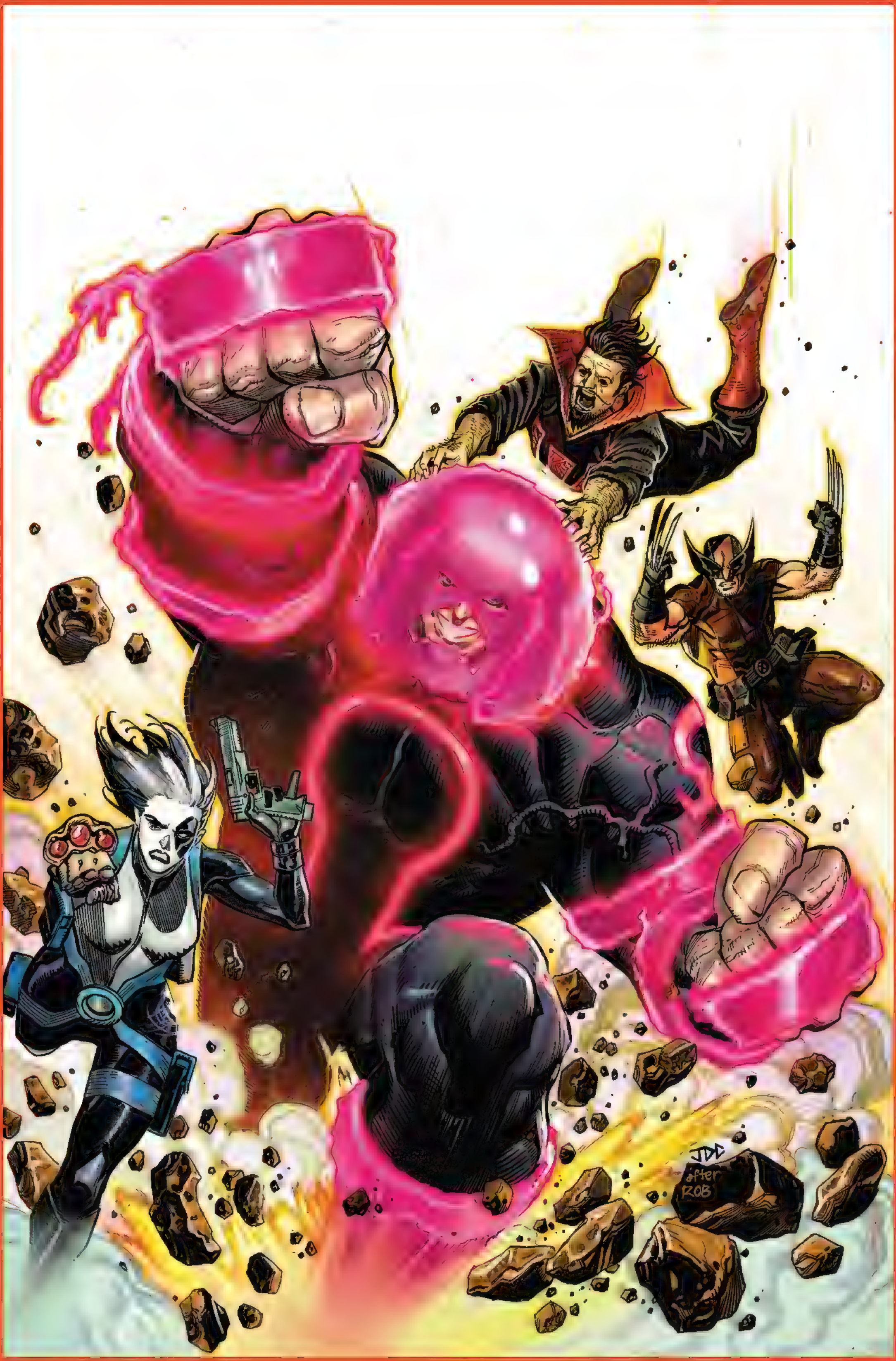
[wolve...........[0.0]
[rine..............[0.0]


I failed in my hunt...
...but I suppose there is some victory in survival.
A god has fallen.
And the Avengers are in the process of occupying its body like mites on a rotting whale.
I had to return here, to the North Pole, to bear witness to this encouraging reminder.
Everything dies. *Everything.*
Even the *immortal* X-Men.
And when the time comes for Krakoa--soon, soon, I can sense it--Kraven will be there to butcher their remains and taste the iron of their hearts.



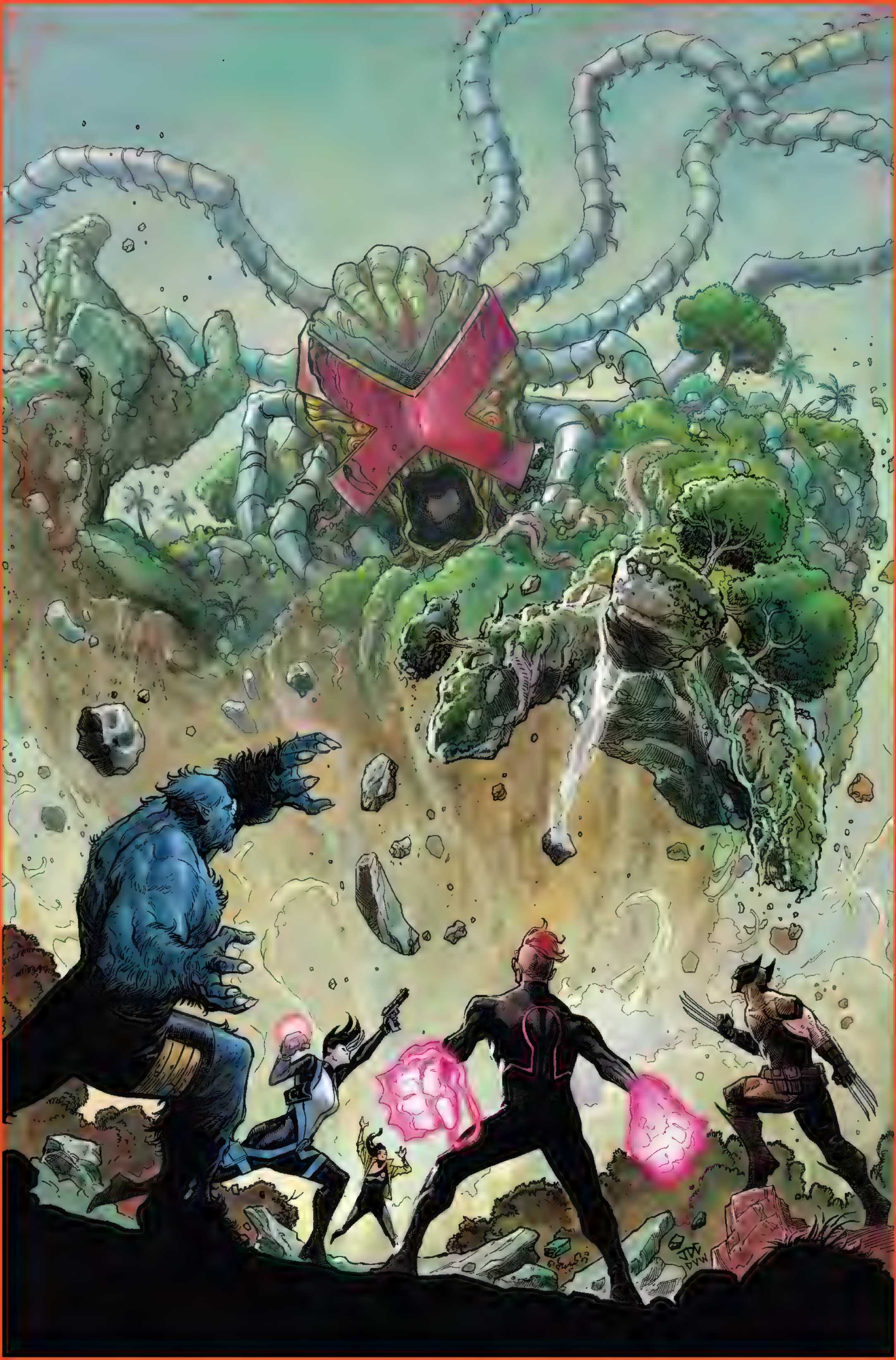
X-Force #27

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White


JDC
after
ROB

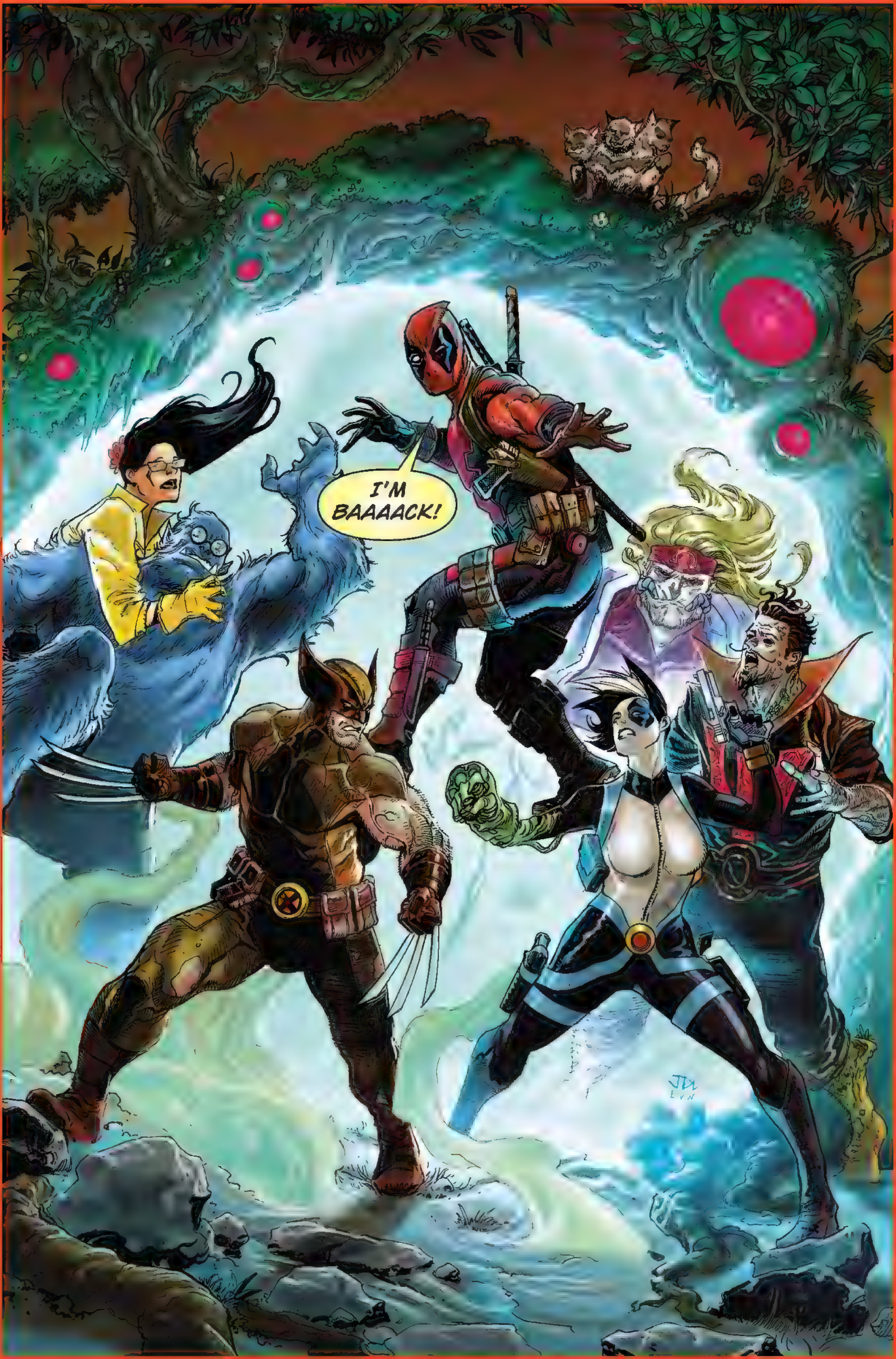
X-Force #28

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White



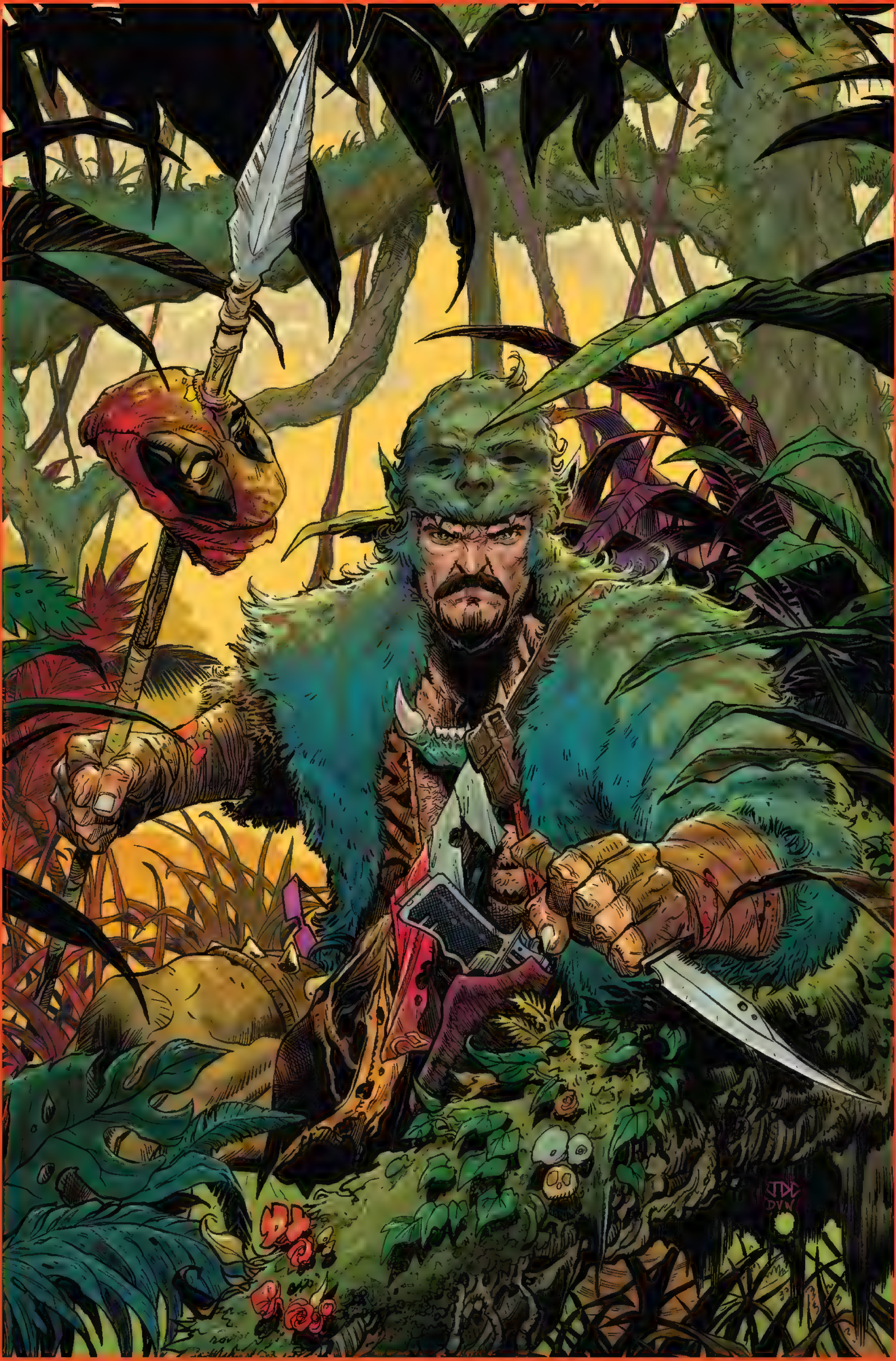
X-Force #29

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White


I'M BAAAACK!
JDK
LVN

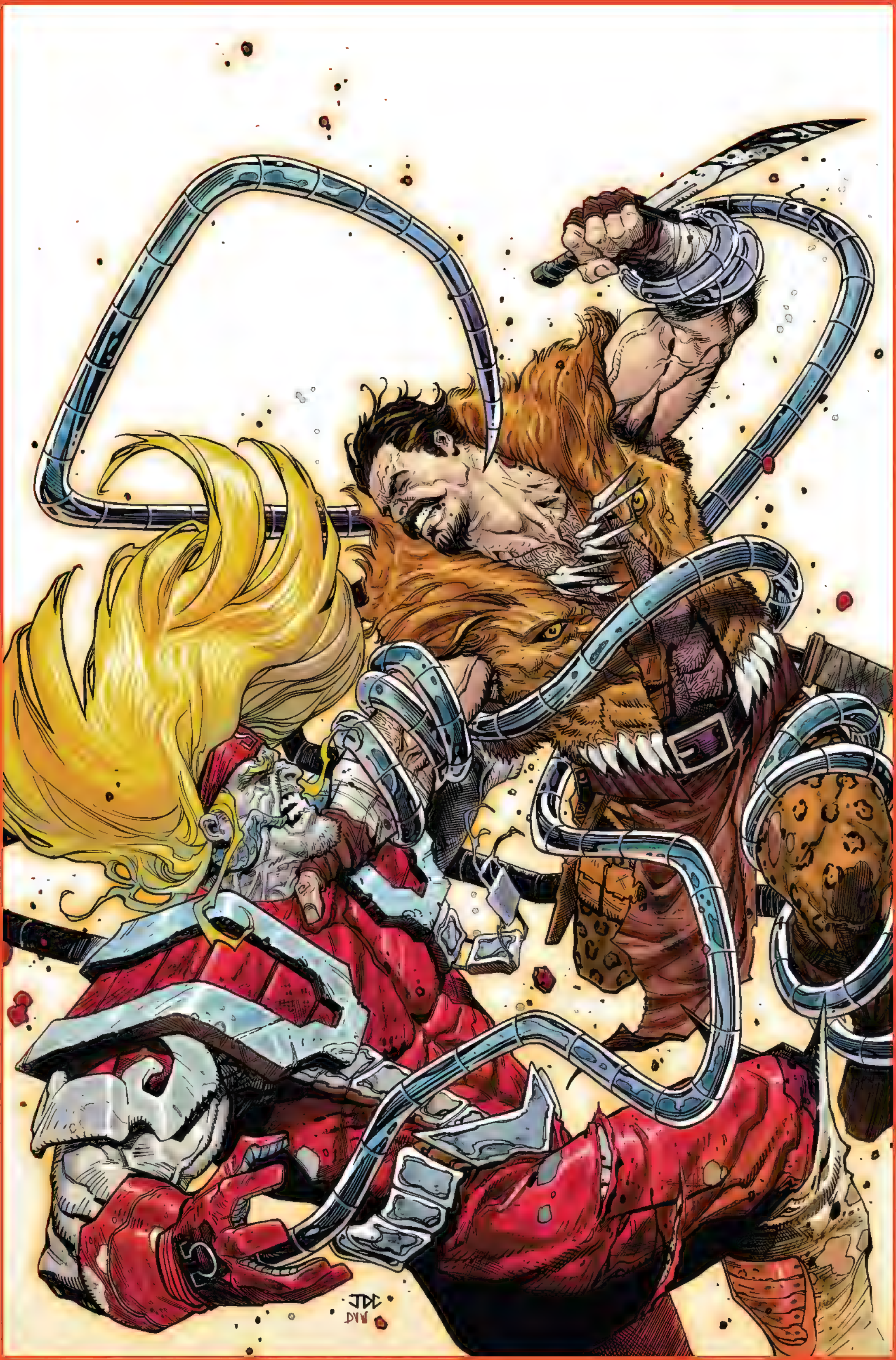
X-Force #30

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White



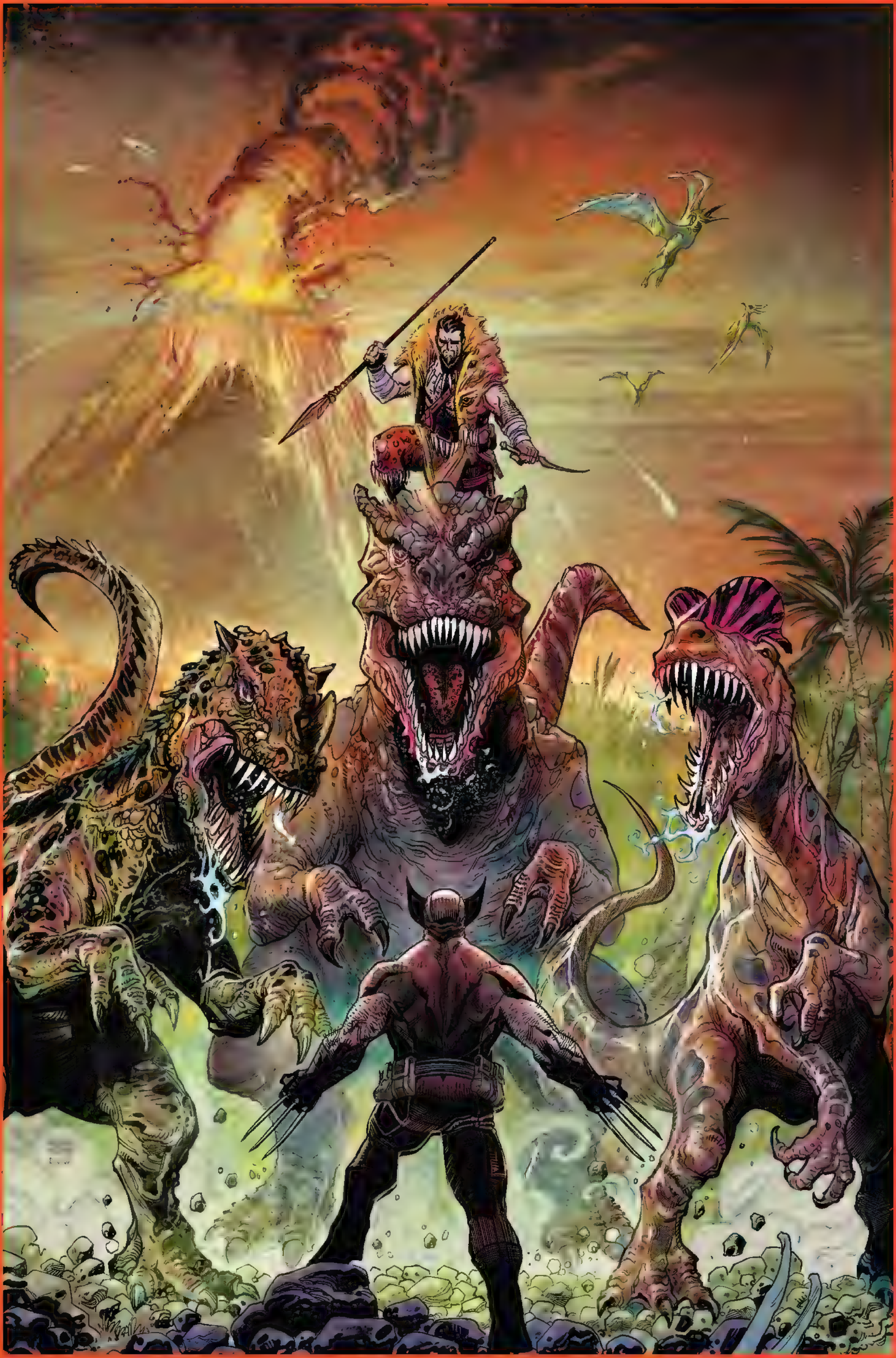
X-Force #31

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White



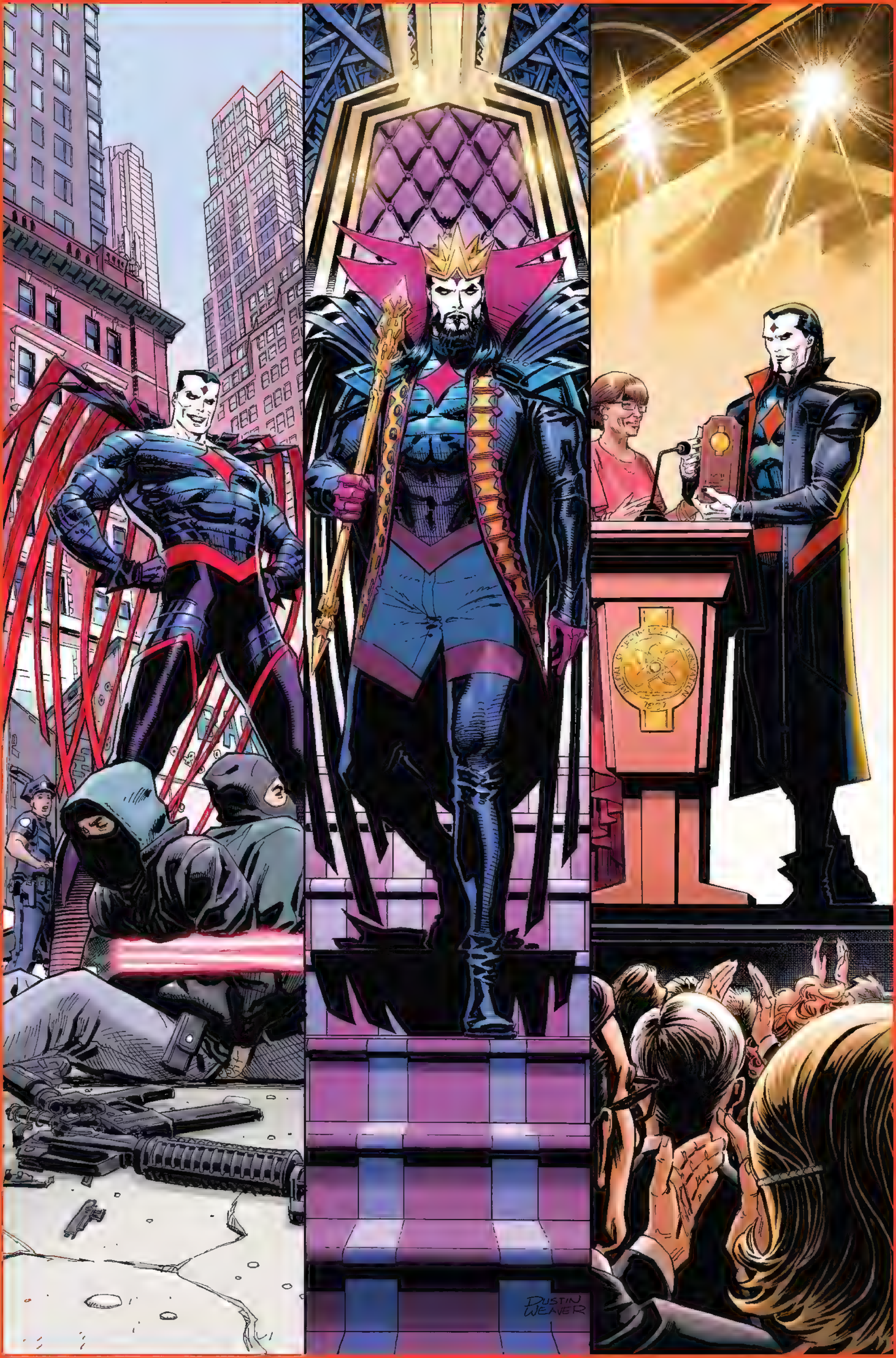
X-Force #32

by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White

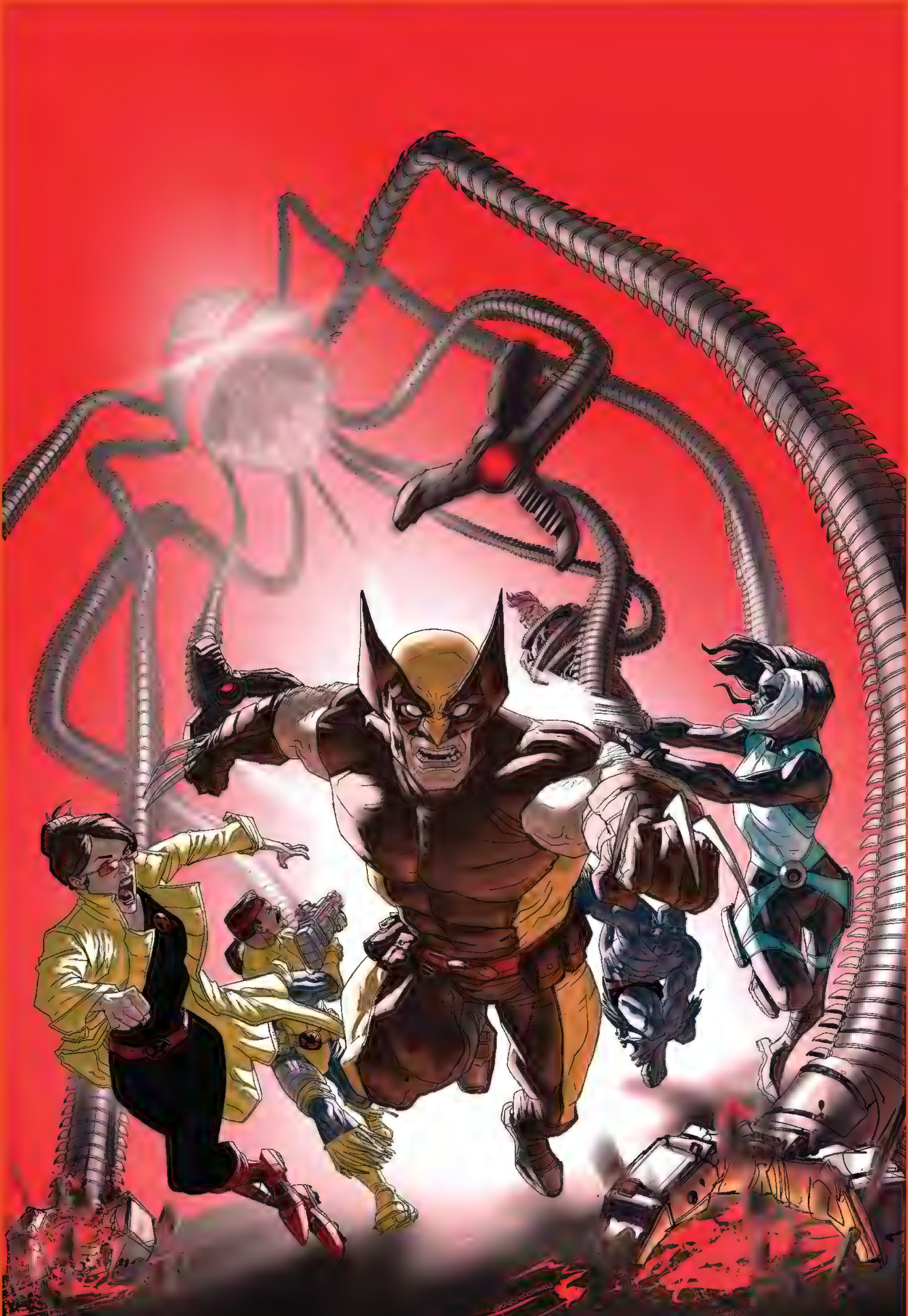


X-Force #33

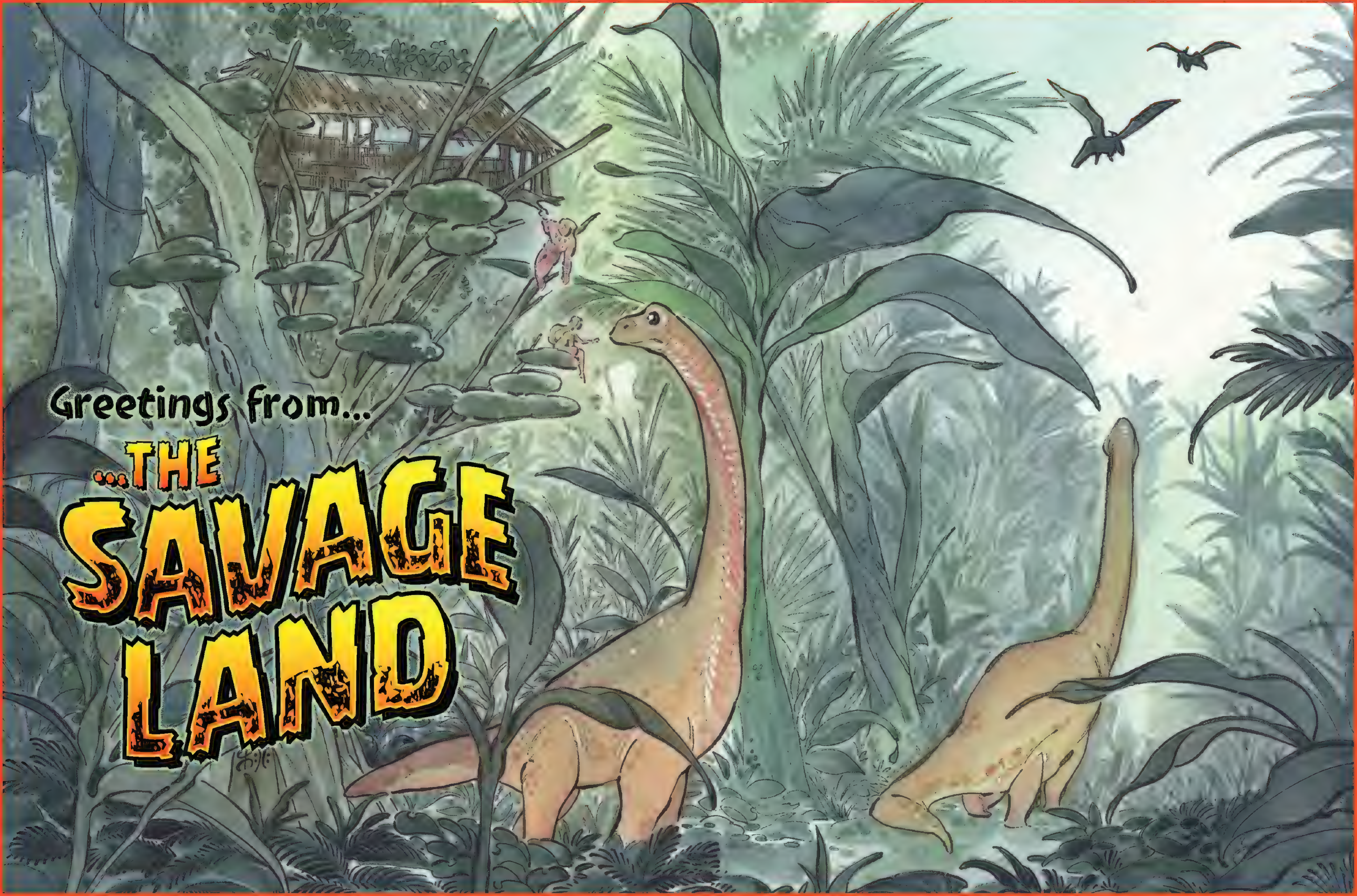
by Joshua Cassara
& Dean White


DUSTIN WEAVER

X-Force #27 Promo Variant by Dustin Weaver

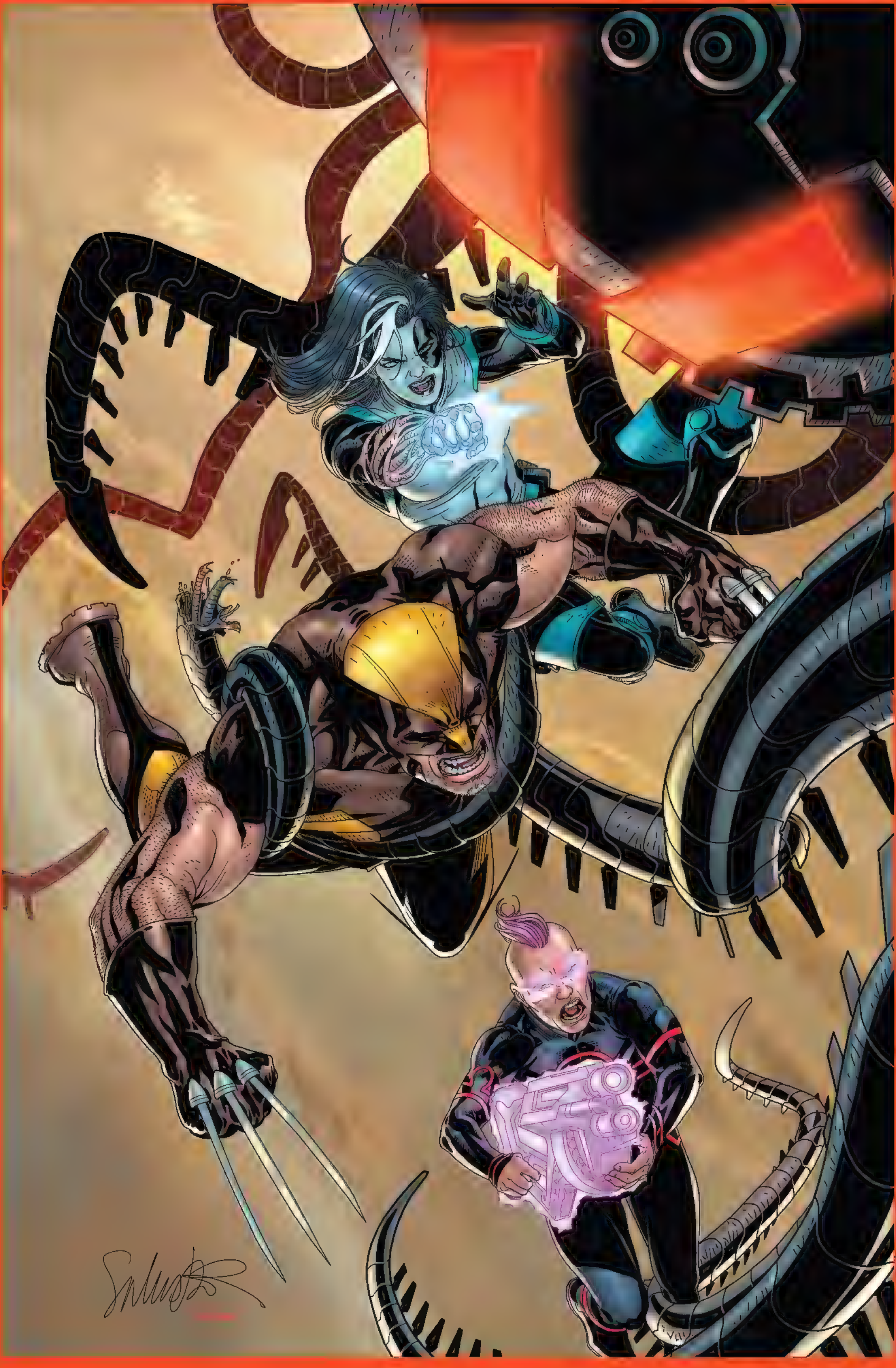


X-Force #27 Variant by Pete Woods


Greetings from...
...THE SAVAGE LAND

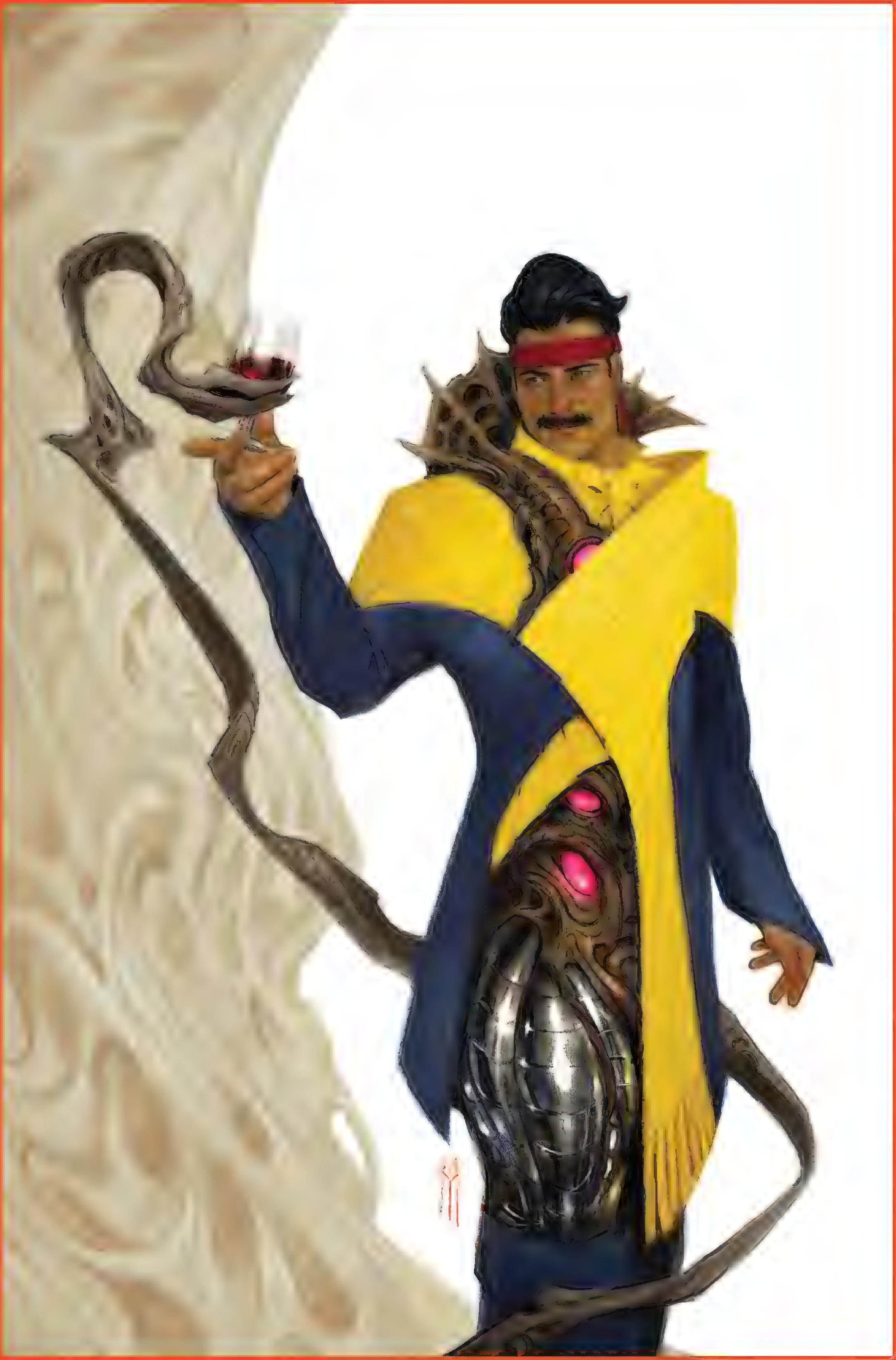
X-Force #28 Stormbreakers Variant by Peach Momoko

X-Force #28 Variant by SKAN

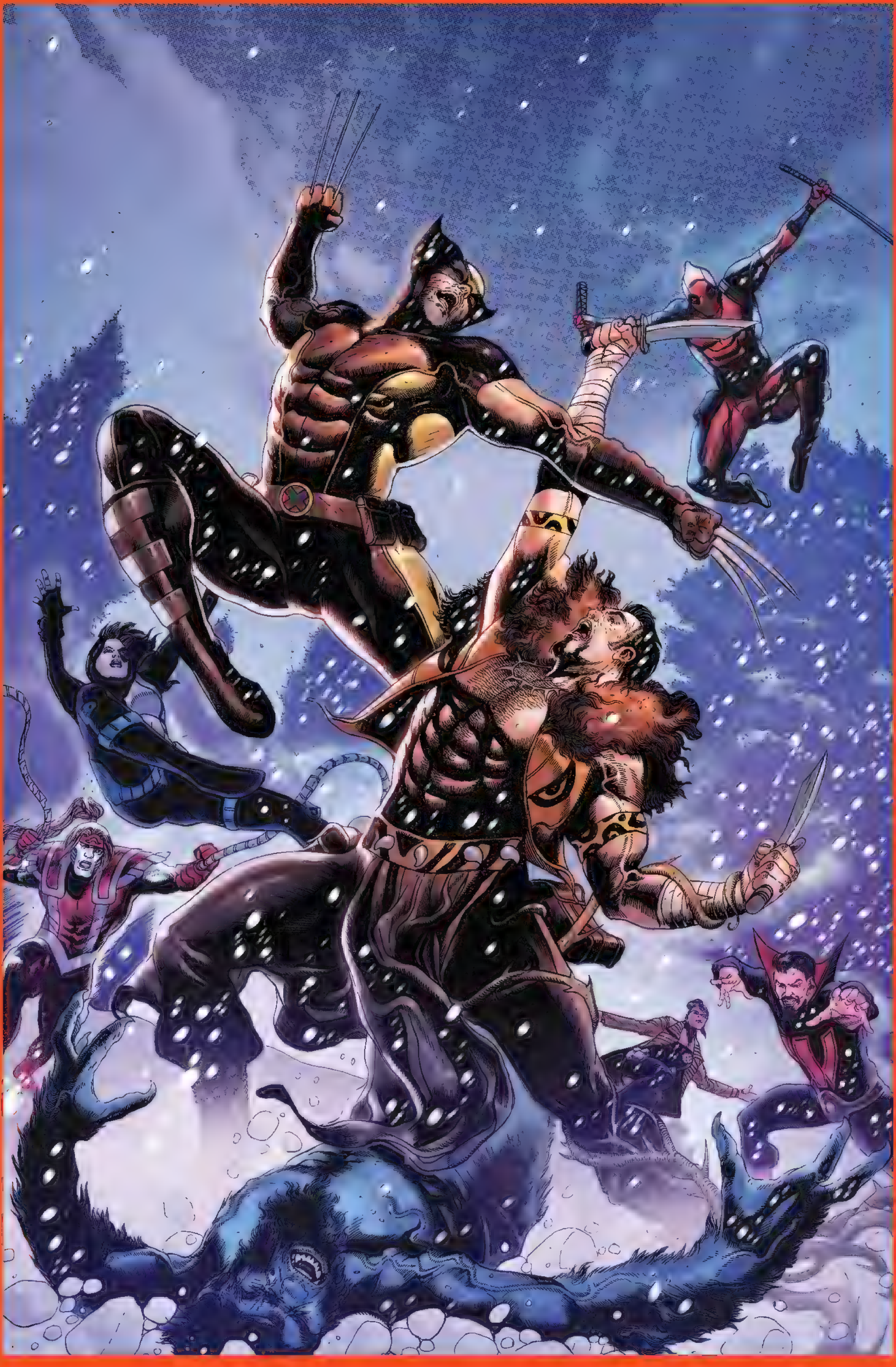


X-Force #29 Variant

by Salvador Larroca
& Edgar Delgado

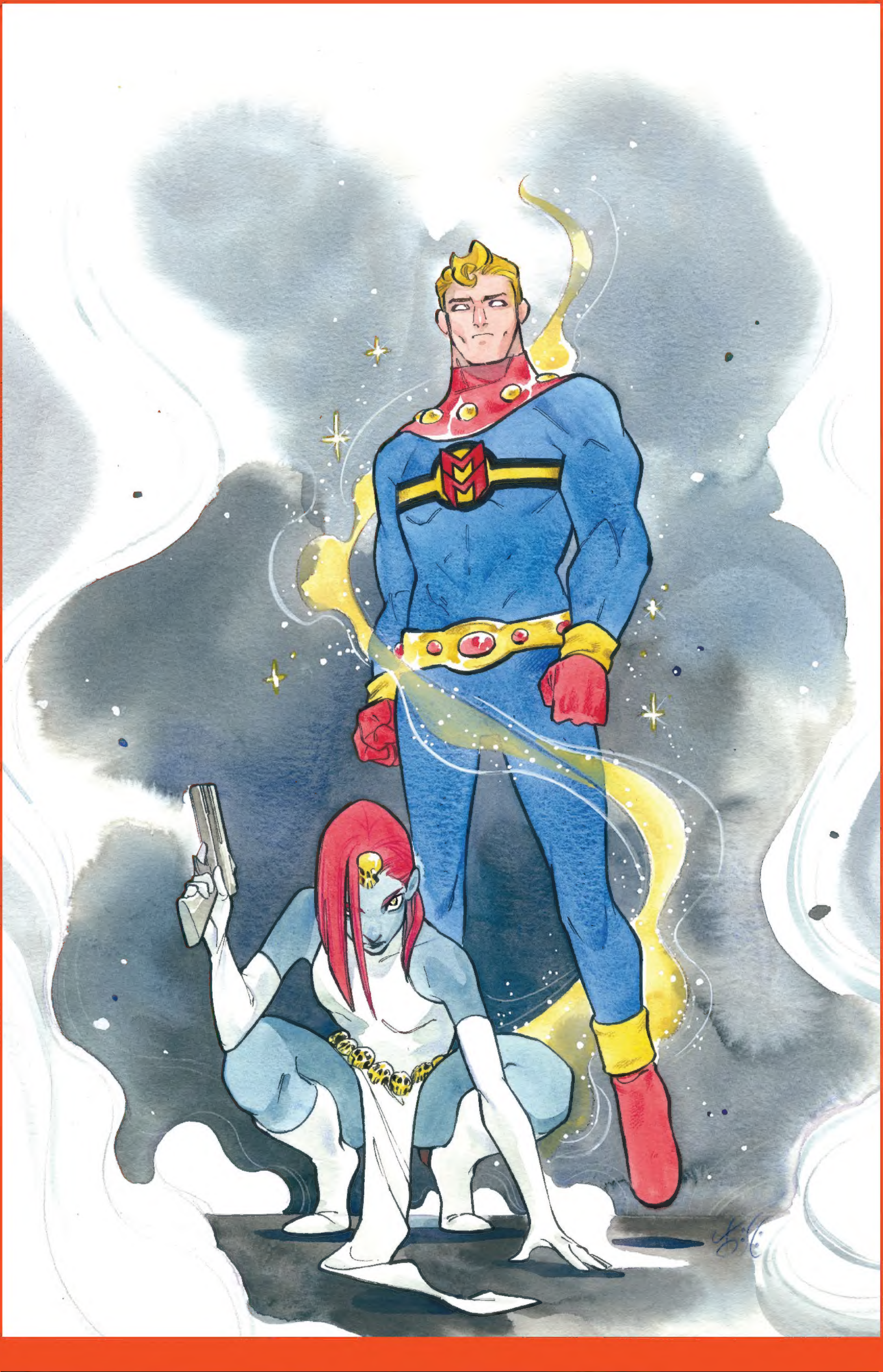


X-Force #29 Hellfire Gala Variant by Miguel Mercado

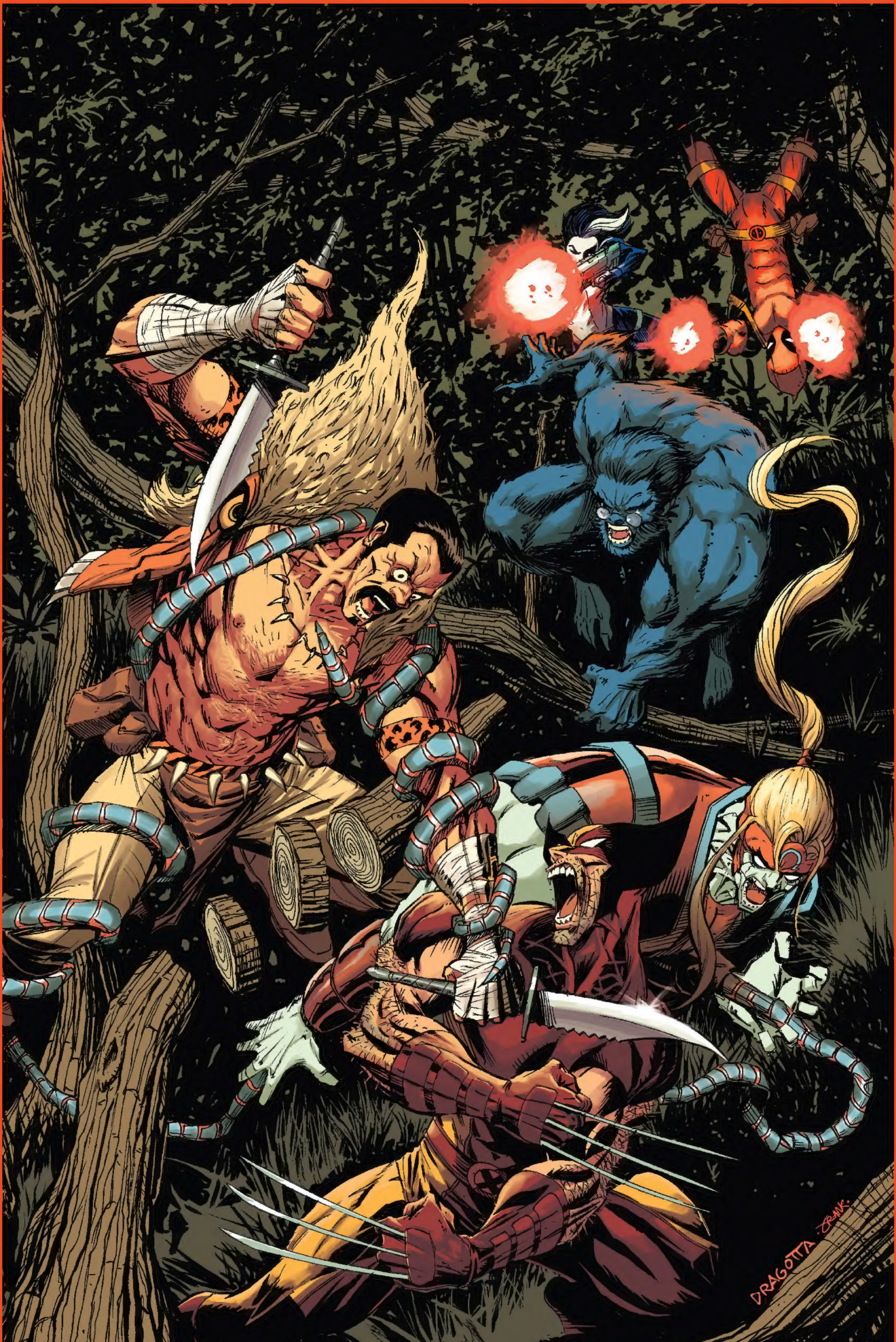


X-Force #30 Variant

by Carlos Magno
& Romulo Fajardo Jr.



X-Force #32 Miracleman Variant by Peach Momoko


DRAGOTTA · FRANK

X-Force #33 Variant

by Nick Dragotta
& Frank Martin

The Hunt for X!

As Wolverine returns to Krakoa, a mind-melding new threat known as Cerebrax grips the island via a security flaw that X-Force will have to patch — with extreme prejudice! Its hunger for minds is insatiable — but when Cerebrax absorbs the consciousnesses and powers of Krakoa's most powerful mutants, X-Force will need to step it up, big time! And now that Earth has a new dominant species in mutantkind, it's time for Kraven the Hunter to prove once more that he remains the apex predator! Will this spell the end of X-Force, and mutantdom, as we know it?

Collecting:
X-Force (2019)
#27–33

By:
Benjamin Percy, Robert Gill,
and GURU-eFX.

MARVEL

PARENTAL
ADVISORY

E
M
P
I
R
E